# LANGUAGE AND THE BODY
## IN THE
# PERFORMANCE RECEPTION
## OF
# SENECAN TRAGEDY

**thesis submitted for admission to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

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**2013**

**Abstract**

Seneca's contribution to the development of Western European theatre and conceptions of theatricality has been underestimated in comparison to that of Greek tragedy. This thesis argues for the continuous importance of Senecan drama in theatrical theory and practice from the sixteenth century until the present day. It examines significant instances of Seneca in performance, and shows how these draw on particular aspects of Seneca's style and dramaturgical technique to coalesce into a sub-genre of tragedy termed here 'hypertragedy' or the 'senecan aesthetic'. The underlying premise of this representational mode is that verbal (vocal) performance is a physical act and induces physical responses. This entails the consequential inference that Senecan theatre is not mimetic – that is, based on an isomorphic identification of character with performer – but rather affective; like oratory, it functions through direct, quasi-musical manipulation of the auditor's senses. The goal of this theatrical form is to articulate extreme states of mind or experiences which cannot be conveyed via conventional mimetic means: pain, frenzy, dissolution of the self. In tracing the theories of tragedy which comprise a narrative contrapuntal to the reception of Seneca onstage, it is possible to identify the factors which have successively constructed, promoted, suppressed, reviled and finally reinstated the senecan aesthetic as philhellenism's other.

**Acknowledgements**

Completing a doctoral thesis is a long and arduous process, and many people have contributed their time, skill and/or compassion along the way. First of all I owe a tremendous debt of thanks to my supervisor, Dr Fiona Macintosh, who could not have supported me with a better blend of rigour and encouragement. Thanks are also due to a number of others: Brasenose College and subsequently St Hilda's College for providing space to live and work; the Clarendon Fund and the Joanna Randall MacIver Fellowship, whose generous support made this work possible; the staff of the Bodleian Libraries, archivist Naomi Setchell at the APGRD, and librarian Sue Willetts at the Institute of Classical Studies for providing invaluable access to, and advice on, research resources; and the organising committees of the Classical Association Conference (2011), UCL Postgraduate Work-in-Progress series (2011), Oxford Postgraduate Work-in-Progress series (2010-12), STAGE (2010), Choralité (2011), the Seneca Roundtable (2012) and the Cambridge Shakespeare Conference (2011) for giving me the opportunity to present portions of this thesis as papers. Several readers have also offered their insights on particular chapters or sections, and I would like to thank Oliver Taplin, Tiffany Stern, Matthew Leigh, Tobias Reinhardt, Luke Pitcher, and Felix Budelmann for their helpful comments at various stages. A few other individuals must also be recognised: Jane Griffiths, for giving me the courage to start this project in the first place; the casts and production teams of *Titus Andronicus* (2010) and *Medea* (2011) for letting me conduct these practical experiments in performance reception; Josh Billings for pointing out the existence of Lessing, and Cécile Dudouyt for the clip of Lavelli's *Medea*; everyone in Tragedy Group for allowing Seneca onto the menu; and finally, most importantly, my wonderful wife Julia, without whom nothing would be possible.

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**Editions and citations:**

All citations of ancient sources refer to the OCT edition unless otherwise indicated. For modern sources, original publication dates are indicated in square brackets if relevant.

Abbreviations follow OCD conventions.

All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

# INTRODUCTION

Seneca's tragedies have exerted a profound influence on the development of European drama. Their strong flavour has provoked extreme responses among both critics and dramatists, ranging from Heywood's ecstatic visions to A.W. Schlegel's disgust.[1] These are not tragedies of action, in which fallible human characters struggle towards insight through interpersonal dialogue; they are tragedies of suffering, in which inhuman and superhuman forces struggle towards personification through torrential poetry, and the human body becomes their battleground. They do not represent events mimetically, in a visual medium, in order to elicit identification and attendant sympathy. Rather, they manufacture sensation, stimulating affect (emotional response) directly, in an aural assault that bypasses the literal and goes straight for the visceral. Speech is a physical process, and language cannot be separated from its production within and impact upon the human body.[2] The body itself possesses forms of kinaesthetic and neurological intelligence which reinforce the verbal. Senecan tragedy provides a particularly rich field through which to examine the interface of vocal, somatic and linguistic experience. At the same time it is necessary to correlate these insights with the evolving treatment of Seneca in the theory and criticism of drama, showing how this has historically been contingent to a substantial degree upon performance practice.

## Senecan, Performance, Reception

Before these observations can be taken any further, the basic terms of reference used in this thesis require elaboration. "Performance", "Reception" and "Senecan tragedy" each bring a

[1] Heywood's preface to his translation of *Thyestes* (ed. Daalder, 1982) depicts a suitably diabolical visitation by the shade of Seneca, who inspires him to write. Schlegel (trans. Black, 1815) calls the plays 'beyond description bombastic and frigid, unnatural both in character and action, revolting from their violation of propriety, and destitute of theatrical effect.'

[2] Bloom (2007), 2-3 examines similar connections 'between verbal, culturally inscribed meaning… [via] the voices of actors - voices that exist at the nexus of the verbal and the concrete.'

distinct set of expectations, and each should be considered in isolation before examining their convergence. Senecan tragedy, first of all, refers to the corpus of seven extant plays (*Medea*, *Phaedra*, *Thyestes*, *Oedipus*, *Hercules Furens*, *Agamemnon* and *Troades*) and one apparently unfinished (*Phoenissae*), attributed to philosopher and statesman Lucius Annaeus Seneca and composed somewhere between 45 and 65 AD.[3] In addition, it includes for the purposes of this thesis a work generally agreed to be spurious,[4] *Hercules Oetaeus*. I have retained the *Hercules Oetaeus* despite its uncertain authorship, because it operates in the same verbal and representational register as the tragedies that consensus regards as authentic. For the same reason, I have excluded the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*: although it contains numerous similarities in vocabulary and form, it belongs more properly to the genre of *fabula praetexta*, and as such to the tradition of historical rather than mythological drama.[5]

It is important from the outset to distinguish between the term "Senecan" (upper-case), which will be used in reference to this deliberately restricted corpus of Latin source-texts, and the term "senecan" (lower-case), which will be used in reference to instances of recurring tropes, motifs, stylistic or dramaturgical features, and thematic preoccupations which have been derived from this corpus but whose usage may not necessarily constitute direct allusion. Adjectival use of the lower-case "senecan" corresponds to the French "*sénéquien*",[6] an application which allows greater flexibility when identifying comparable features in superficially unrelated dramatic texts. These features interact to form what I term

[3] Seneca *Tragicus* and Seneca *Philosophus* are now generally agreed to be the same person – e.g. in Costa (1974), Rosenmeyer (1989), Bartsch (2009) and Fitch (2010) – but Kohn (2003) adopts a dissenting view. Coffey (1973), 150 summarises the evidence for dating: a plausible *post quem* for *Med*. is Claudius' British expedition (45AD); *HF* seems to be parodied in the *Apocolocyntosis* (54AD), giving a plausible *ante quem*. The debate with Mela recorded in Quint. *Inst*. 8.3.31 corroborates Seneca's interest in tragedy around AD 50. On the basis of stylometric analysis, Fitch (1981) splits the plays into three groups, with *Thy*. and *Phoen*. significantly postdating the rest, while the polymetric choruses in *Ag*. and *Oed*. may be early experiments. See further Nisbet (2010) who dates *Thy*. to 62AD on the basis of contemporary political references. Given this data, as Kohn concedes, it would be a remarkable coincidence if *two* Senecas were writing at the time (although he did come from a literary family). Regardless of their authorship, however, the plays remain our sole extant example of first-century tragedy.

[4] The most up-to-date treatment of *HO* is Walde (1992).

[5] On *Octavia*'s date and attribution, see Boyle (2006), xiii-xvi. The articles collected in Wilson (2003) address various aspects of the play.

[6] This usage is based in particular on Federici (1974).

in this thesis the "senecan aesthetic".[7] In order for a work to qualify as senecan it must exhibit two or more of the following properties: rhetoric, excess, metatheatricality, delirium, possession, abjection, horror, confinement, or *sympatheia*. In conjunction, these qualities produce a mode of non-mimetic theatricality of which Seneca was not necessarily the first exponent, but has certainly become the most influential. Individual senecan attributes do occur in other forms or genres – visceral horror in *Grand Guignol*, for instance, or abjection and delirium in absurdist comedy – but the family resemblance is too slight in these cases to warrant inclusion in this thesis. For the same reason, I do not address the potentially senecan elements of opera or gothic melodrama, limiting the field to verse drama only.[8] Within verse drama, a sub-genre – termed hypertragedy – may reasonably be expected to reference Seneca directly;[9] at the same time, however, the senecan aesthetic may recur without deliberate application.

While scripts may of course be analysed in their capacity as literature, certain aspects of the senecan aesthetic only surface when a play is staged. In some respects, it could be (and has been) argued that the written script is only ever a fragment of the fully realised state it can attain in performance.[10] The converse – that any given performance violently forecloses on the manifold possibilities latent in the written word – could also be asserted,[11] but when concentrating on the concrete historical occasion of performance, rather than the trans-historical abstract interpretation afforded by reading, the script must be regarded as a

[7] The senecan aesthetic is rhizomorphic in the sense of Deleuze & Guattari (1987), 10: 'A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines… [It] can rebound time and time again after most of it has been destroyed.'

[8] I have also imposed geographical limits, considering only French and English reception, with some reference to concurrent developments in Germany; Seneca's presence in Spanish and Italian drama has never been in doubt.

[9] *Hypertragödie* is the term applied to Kleist by Hermand (1995).

[10] A position summarised by Worthen (1997), 4: 'Stage production is, in a sense, the final cause for the writing of plays, which are fully realised only in… theatrical performance.' Worthen goes on to argue (p62) that 'stage production does more than merely evoke, enunciate, or complete the text; it re-presents the text in a variety of incommensurable visual, embodied, kinetic discourses.'

[11] This observation has been made from perspectives as different as those of nineteenth-century essayist Charles Lamb and twenty-first century director Ann Bogart. Lamb (1812) complains that no living actor can do justice to Shakespearean sublimity, whereas Bogart (2001) regards all decisions taken in the interpretation of a text as acts of necessary violence.

component, not as a self-contained totality. Scholarly controversy over the staging of Seneca in antiquity has inhibited discussion of the tragedies' performative dimension,[12] but as A.J. Boyle has demonstrated, this should present no impediment to examining their post-Renaissance incarnations. Boyle's *Tragic Seneca: an essay in the theatrical tradition* (1997), which remains the only systematic study of Senecan reception across the early modern period, focuses on establishing thematic and structural affiliations. This thesis addresses the additional dramaturgical and aesthetic dimensions produced by the physical realisation of senecan tragedy over the course of its documented performance history. Insights into the theatrically-oriented aspects of Seneca's work – its affective capacity, for instance, or the tensions between aural and visual data, or the ways in which bodies are manipulated by language, or its concern with representing the unspeakable – become sharper and more pronounced when the plays are treated as performance texts. Embedded in a succession of architectural, corporeal, social and aesthetic environments, they have acquired material polysemy. Seneca's work may or may not have been staged contemporaneously with its composition, but the plays have had an unambiguous presence on the modern stage, and it is this presence which allows us to approach them as blueprints for performance.

Theatrical performance offers a particularly productive zone in which to investigate the dynamics of classical reception, occurring as it does at the semantically saturated interface between language and the body. An enormous range of social and behavioural practices are compressed into the activity of performance. Joseph R. Roach defends the importance of studying live theatre by observing that actor/audience relationships 'concentrate the complex values of a culture… They embody its shared language of spoken words and expressive gestures, its social expectations and psychological commonplaces.' Acting – that is, impersonating entities other than oneself or states of mind other than one's

[12] See chapters 1 and 8.

own – necessarily involves the 'philosophical and scientific issue of the relationship of mind and body.'[13] Roach's study shows how theories of acting developed historically in conjunction with theories of psychosomatic operation. The body, as Erika Fischer-Lichte points out, 'like any other cultural phenomenon, is historically determined', situated within a web of socialising forces that regulate everything from posture and mobility to patterns of sleep and digestion, responses to pain, expressions of sexuality and desire, use of the voice and habitual pathways through space.[14] Like Roach, Fischer-Lichte demonstrates how discourses surrounding the body inform the craft of acting. Highly visible, and skilled in (re)producing affective states on demand, in themselves and/or in others, actors represent and amplify the underlying attitudes towards mind and body that result in a given mode of delivery.

When the text performed is an ancient text, further factors come into play, namely the relationship of the individual speaker to the material s/he is embodying, and the relationship of the audience to that material as transmitted through the speaker's body. How a performance relates to text, or for the purposes of this thesis, to a specific group of classical texts, also discloses something about the nature of that text in its performative capacity. According to Edith Hall, 'It is the *triangular* relationship between ancient text, *performer* and audience that distinguishes "Performance Reception" from the study of [other] ways in which ancient texts have been received,' and this is due in no small part to 'the *somatic* quality of theatre.'[15] Texts as they are received in live performance are qualitatively different from texts as they are received in print media, assimilated to the conventions of the present and made manifest at a peculiar intersection of the acutely intimate and the broadly public.

The actor's contribution, and the actor's experience of performing Seneca, is therefore just as valid and valuable an object of study as that of the audience. This premise is informed

[13] Roach (1985), 11-13.
[14] Fischer-Lichte (1989). See also Bourdieu (1991) on *habitus*.
[15] Hall (2010), emphasis original.

by studies in performance phenomenology, particularly those of Bert States (whose work concentrates primarily on the twentieth century) and Bruce R. Smith (on the early modern period).[16] Essentially, this approach contends that rather than analysing performance in terms of its anthropological significance, for example, or its semiotic content,[17] performance is an embodied experience best articulated through thick description and close attention to physical detail. One drawback of this approach is that it can tend to focus on circumstantial evidence at the expense of the text, and I have therefore tried to combine it with constant close textual analysis throughout. I am indebted to scholars such as Stephe Harrop and Jane Montgomery-Griffiths whose work has widened the field of classical performance reception to take account of the practitioner's uniquely privileged and subjective point of view.[18] Obviously for historical performance events, the sources of data are very different (and as Robert Hume points out, undergo a paradigm shift around 1700):[19] anecdotes, biography, illustrations, designs, directors' notes, reviews, contemporary handbooks of delivery and contemporary aesthetic theory may be combined with the play-scripts themselves to yield an impression of how Senecan tragedy was perceived by those who performed it as well as those who witnessed it; its reception, in other words, as a holistic sensory and cognitive event.

At the same time, it must be recognised that theatrical performance evolves in constant dialogue with theatrical theory. Major innovations in aesthetics (d'Aubignac's 1657 *Pratique du Théâtre*, for instance, or Schlegel's 1808 *Dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, or Artaud's 1938 *Théâtre et son Double*) made a considerable difference to how tragedy, and Senecan tragedy in particular, was regarded. While not all theoretical texts concern

[16] States (1985); Smith (1988) and (2010). Also Carlson (1989) and McAuley (1999) on space; Bloom (2007) on voice. In practising historical phenomenology, Smith (2010), 36 applies the principle that 'You can't know anything apart from the way in which you come to know it'.
[17] Richard Schechner and Eli Rozik, respectively
[18] Harrop (2010); Montgomery-Griffiths (2007) and (2010).
[19] Hume (2007), 34: 'The late seventeenth century… remains a realm in which we treasure every scrap of information… A century later our problem is not guessing how to generate a picture from scraps and hints and absences - but rather how to select the bits of evidence we will extract from great heaps of stuff and choose to privilege.'

themselves with the practicalities of stagecraft, they do provide valuable insights into how critics anticipated a contemporary audience would be moved, amused, affronted, shocked, transported, 'ravish'd', or otherwise affected by dramatic material.[20] A well-documented shift occurred in this regard around the middle of the eighteenth century, a shift that can essentially be summarised as the transition from a theatre of the word, in which the actor's role consisted of the effective delivery of text, to a theatre of the pictorial, in which the actor's role came to consist of the effective portrayal of character.[21] Individual states of mind replaced studies of the passions at large. Concomitantly, the presentation of dramatic discourse as a mode of formal rhetoric was superseded by a more mimetic approach which used tone and gesture not as persuasive tactics but rather as representational indices of an imagined interiority. It was during this period that Seneca's stock as a dramatic resource fell substantially.

The narrative of Seneca's stage appearances, then, is closely interwoven with contemporary debates about the utility, propriety and psychosomatic mechanics of theatrical performance. In Renaissance theory, for example, Seneca trumped Aristotle as a practical template for tragic dramaturgy, but the neoclassical fixation on formal accuracy reversed this position; in the eighteenth century, form then gave way to function, recasting Aristotle as a guide to purging immoral passions through catharsis rather than crafting a well-made play. Whatever successive movements in theatrical theory happened to require from senecan tragedy, be that a formal framework or a root of all evil, inescapably influenced how the works appeared onstage. Theory rarely, of course, provides testimony of actual performances, and nor should it be regarded as necessarily initiating trends in practice. Nevertheless, it does open a channel for contemporary voices struggling to articulate their perception of a

[20] As demonstrated by Roach (1985).

[21] Observed by Steiner (1961). Smith (1988), 59-97 shows how theatre architecture contributed to this shift. See also Roach (1985), 69-155 on character and the concept of sensibility, and articles collected in Moody & O'Quinn (eds., 2007) on various aspects of eighteenth-century dramaturgy. Dupont (2007), esp. 96-98 & 122-23 regards its progressive *effacement de toutes les marques de théâtralité* as a form of Aristotelianism: as naturalism and pictorialism develop, the stage is no longer ludic, *un espace de jeu*, but rather *un espace fictionel* (p129).

theatrical idiom. The assumptions, the undisclosed interests, and the often all too naked prejudice informing these perceptions act as a counterpoint to their physical realisation on the stage.

Reception is a complex process, more often than not involving the interaction or intervention of multiple texts in negotiating the relationship between ostensible 'source' and 'target'. In positioning this thesis within the emergent discipline of Classical Reception Studies, it should be initially established that the existence of any given text is to be regarded as cumulative and palimpsestic. This thesis adopts the position first articulated by Charles Martindale in 1993, that 'meaning is always realised at the point of reception.'[22] It does not practise cultural history in the sense of examining synchronic variation across a particular slice of time in which the impact of modern work/s – measured by 'the size and volubility of [their] audience' – determines the critical agenda.[23] Rather, it takes the view that only through diachronic study can the reader become aware of those aspects of a given text which have endured, and indeed those which have accrued to it over time.[24] As Michael Walton declares, 'There is no such thing as authenticity',[25] an observation particularly applicable to theatre, a medium composed entirely of copies, iterations, absences, and ghosts.[26] Negotiating the ephemerality of performance is one of the principal challenges of theatre history; and although proposing no solution, I wish to acknowledge at the outset how the present study is implicated in an ever-expanding web of partial and mediated representations.

Over the past decade, Oxford's Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) has produced four volumes on the production history of particular ancient plays:

[22] Martindale (1993), 3.
[23] Goldhill (2011), 15.
[24] A brilliant example of such a reading is Thomas (2001). The debate between diachronic formalism and synchronic historicism, broadly speaking, is encapsulated by Martindale (2010) and Goldhill (2010) respectively.
[25] Walton (2006), 25; cf. p51: 'Perhaps for a theatre work a better word than translation would be transubstantiation.'
[26] Rayner (2006) treats theatre as 'haunted' and 'haunting'.

*Medea in Performance* (2000), *Agamemnon in Performance* (2005), *Aristophanes in Performance* (2007), and most recently *Sophocles: Oedipus Tyrannus* for the Cambridge "Plays in Production" series;[27] also, with a different focus, Hall and Macintosh's *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre* (2005). A methodological issue persists throughout: are the ancient plays to be regarded as absolute source-texts, or as passing, contributory moments in a cumulative set of performance realisations? Does the researcher adopt the modern production's perspective on its source/s, or speak on behalf of an ancient text arriving at successive destinations? In the case of plays with both Greek and Roman ancestry, one must either distinguish exactly where the modern version has derived its material, or if taking the stance that these are fundamentally Greek texts, and Seneca's just another instance of reception, acknowledge how this participates in constructing a teleological passage of Ancient Greek "originals" through time. My solution to this dilemma is to declare partiality immediately, and adopt the Senecan corpus as my starting point, examining the passage of the works through successive incarnations. In order to redress a perceived imbalance, this thesis aims to construct the narrative of Seneca's appearances onstage. It does not contradict the existing scholarship which has hitherto focused on Greek drama, but offers a supporting counterbalance, making a case for "not only, but also".[28]

*Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre* covers the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, precisely that period when Seneca is least in evidence, and although touching on the Senecan contribution at times (for instance, in relation to the Dryden/Lee *Oedipus*, or Thomson's *Agamemnon*), it remains intrinsically oriented towards Hellenism. *Medea in Performance* makes even less reference to the coexistence of ancient models; despite its balanced

[27] Macintosh (2009) contains a chapter on Seneca's version and its reception in the early modern period, neoclassical France and the Restoration, and in addition notes Seneca's unacknowledged presence in many modern productions of *Oedipus Tyrannos*.

[28] Seneca is not, of course, the sole (or even primary) ancient resource for many of the receptions discussed, but once it is recognised that not only Ovid *but also* Seneca speaks through *Titus Andronicus*, and not only Euripides *but also* Seneca speaks through *Phèdre*, continuities may be identified.

introduction, Seneca only makes a cameo appearance when Diane Purkiss notes the blending of both versions in Lady Macbeth's 'I have given suck' soliloquy.[29] No acknowledgement is made, for example, of the Senecan elements in Glover's 1767 adaptation, nor does Margaret Reynolds point to the Senecan provenance of the pyrrhic "I am Medea" repeated so often in opera.[30] Instead, we are presented throughout with reiterations of 'the Euripidean original', tacitly reinforcing the endurance of 'that which is timeless and universally comprehensible within it.'[31] Pantelis Michelakis' introduction to *Agamemnon in Performance* likewise makes a promising offer, opening with the question, 'Why do we choose to speak regularly of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and hardly ever of the *Agamemnon* of Seneca?'[32] An answer may perhaps be sought in the fact that all but three chapters (out of seventeen) are exclusively Hellenist, adopting the premise that the collection is concerned with 'the changing relationships between Greek plays and modern audiences' and the performance history of 'Aeschylus' original'.[33]

Most prominent among the chapters which do include Seneca, Hall's 'Aeschylus' Clytemnestra versus her Senecan tradition' does little to recuperate the Roman dramatist. Hall argues that Aeschylus' militant, masculine, maternal Clytemnestra has been 'eviscerated' by a line of variations on the vacillating, neurotic, adulterous Clytemnestra, 'driven by her clitoris', for which Seneca was responsible.[34] Happily, by the late nineteenth century, 'the Aeschylean Clytemnestra' – that is, 'the *authentic* Aeschylean Clytemnestra,' – 'was finally to wreak her revenge on the Senecan tradition.'[35] Once again, albeit for updated reasons, Seneca is relegated to secondary status and condemned as an undesirable interloper.

[29] Purkiss (2000), 43-46.
[30] Hall (2000); Reynolds (2000).
[31] 'Euripidean original': Mcdonald (2000), 108; 'timeless and universally comprehensible': Stehlíková (2000), 188.
[32] Michelakis (2005), 2.
[33] Hardwick (2005), 207 and Foley (2005), 307 respectively.
[34] Hall (2005), 56.
[35] Hall (2005), 73-75 emphasis added.

These studies, along with others such as Amy Green's,[36] have set the practical agenda for classical performance reception. Entwined with the Hellenist narrative, however, is this rather more shadowy substratum of senecanism, the study of which both challenges and complements existing research.

What is senecan about Seneca?

In order to establish a working definition of the senecan aesthetic, it is necessary to identify the factors which, in combination, produce this type of theatrical experience. Because these factors converge with particular intensity in Seneca's oeuvre, the term "senecanism" or "the senecan aesthetic" provides a convenient rubric, but need not imply a direct linear or derivational relationship between the texts concerned.[37] Nor need it imply that all factors must be present for senecanism to take shape, although two or more factors are minimally necessary to shift the relationship from pure coincidence to a meaningful instance of reception. Not all simulated violence, for instance, is senecan, but staged mutilation in conjunction with heightened (lyrical or rhetorical) discourse may be regarded as such. Obviously, the more factors which come into play, the more "senecan" a piece becomes; Eliot's witticism that 'the influence of Seneca is much more apparent in the Elizabethan drama than it is in the plays of Seneca' may be reclaimed as a serious proposition.[38] Early modern playwrights such as Robert Garnier and the translators of the *Tenne Tragedies* employed a "thick" or saturated senecanism which maximised the mutual augmentation of these tropes, whereas the senecanism of John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee a century later was

[36] Green (1994); see also e.g. Macdonald (1992) and (2003); Wetmore (2002); Hartigan (1995); Walton (2006); Ewans (2002); chapters by Hardwick and Michelakis in Martindale & Thomas (eds., 2006) and various of the essays collected in Hardwick & Stray (2008). The diverse theoretical approaches to the subject are laid out in Hall & Harrop (2010).
[37] Hardwick (2011), 39-44 outlines this approach to classical reception.
[38] Eliot (1951) [1927b], 132.

diluted by decidedly non-senecan elements such as romantic sub-plots and spectacular tableaux.

This formulation incorporates dominant perceptions of Seneca while avoiding their clichés.[39] The blood and the bombast contribute to a web of dramaturgical components whose interaction produces a theatre of affect, rather than one of mimesis; that is, a mode of performance which immerses its audience in sensation rather than appealing to their sympathetic imagination, acting *upon* them rather than acting *before* them. Margarete Bieber summarises Seneca's style as '*bombastisch, rhetorisch, deklamatorisch und pathetisch*,'[40] and I argue that these traits place Seneca's tragedies early but decisively in a tradition of non-mimetic theatre. They did not spring up *ex nihilo*, but because the Senecan corpus became such an important catalyst for later developments in drama, it is worth laying out the characteristics that make it quintessentially senecan.

**Rhetoric**

Extremes of sensation such as pain cannot be communicated, and indeed obliterate linguistic expression. In other words, according to Jonas Barish, 'Where rapture and suffering become so intense they block out consciousness, they block out figuration also.'[41] In senecan discourse, however, this point of oblivion is never reached. Where mimetic authenticity would require the voice to fail, or speech to be replaced by inarticulate cries, senecan characters continue instead to verbalise their distress. Metaphor opens up otherwise inaccessible interiors, whether somatic or emotional, in an attempt to represent the

[39] 'His rhetoric, his ghosts, his sententious morality, his flair for horror and blood-vengeance' (Steiner 1961, 21); 'the vengeful ghost, the moralizing chorus… the protracted passages of stichomythia, the speeches on stock themes such as the fickleness of fortune, and the evils of ambition, the passages expounding Stoic ideals, the stage horrors, and a profusion of sententiae' (Binns 1974, 228); 'the stoical behaviour and posturing of the tragic hero-villain, the rhetorical communication, the sensationalism of plot and incident, the implacable skeins of revenge, the demonstrations of cruelty, the descriptions of bloody acts, the reflectiveness of theme and tone in many speeches, the supernatural usages, the chorus, verbal devices' (Lloyd Evans 1965, 124).
[40] Bieber (1953-54), 102.
[41] Scarry (1985), 4-55; Barish (1966), 84.

unrepresentable, to impress upon the auditor the intensity of immanent *nefas*.[42] The actor's craft, under these circumstances, lies less in manufacturing the illusion of a suffering subject than in embodying the given text in such a way as to convey effectively the sense-impression of pain to his auditors, making the enactment of such drama an oratorical act.[43]

Clytemnestra, racked by the *nefas* she is planning, diagnoses her psychosomatic condition:

> maiora cruciant quam ut moras possim pati.
> Flammae medullas et cor exurunt meum;
> mixtus dolori subdidit stimulos timor;
> invidia pulsat pectus, hinc animum iugo
> premit cupido turpis et vinci vetat (*Ag*. 131-35).

*Cruciant* gives her pain physical agency, reinforced by its anatomical location in her *medullas*, her *cor* and her *pectus*. Coupled with the sensory specificity of fire (*flammae exurunt*, 136), the conflicting emotions batter and crush her (*pulsat, premit*). Similarly, Phaedra's *dolor* rises as volcanic heat: *alitur et crescit malum / et ardet intus, qualis Aetnaeo vapor / exundat antro*, 101-03), or as a forest fire: *intimis errat ferus / visceribus ignis mersus et venis latens, / ut agilis altas flamma percurrit trabes* (642-44), internal sensations expressed obliquely yet sensually through simile. Medea finds elemental comparisons for her limitless *furor*, articulating the inner topography of her rage with surreal precision:

[42] *nefas* in Seneca: *Oed*. 15, 246, 274, 398, 1031; *Ag*. 30, 124; *Thy*. 28, 194, 265, 624, 689, 1006; *HF* 500, 603, 1004; *Tro*. 48, 678, 1086; *Phoen*. 80, 223, 300; *Med*. 122, 261, 931; *Phaed*. 115, 127-28, 130, 143, 153, 160. Dupont (1995), 57-63 regards Senecan *nefas* as signifying the limits of humanity.

[43] Fantham (2002); Gunderson (2000) discuss the problematic similarity of Roman oratory to Roman acting. Dupont (1995), 91-96 argues that Roman theatre used oratorical *actio* to stimulate emotion, not as a means of persuasion but as an end in itself. Dupont (1995), 120 writes of the Senecan actor that *Son corps est un porte-parole*.

Quae Scylla, quae Charybdis Ausonium mare
Siculumque sorbens, quaeve anhelantem premens
Titana tantis Aetna fervebit minis?
Non rapidus amnis, non procellosum mare
pontusve coro saevus aut vis ignium
adiuta flatu possit inhibere impetum
irasque nostras (*Med*. 408-14).

The corporeal alienation experienced by Senecan characters in distress may be illustrated by the *Phoenissae*'s Oedipus, who addresses his own hand (*dextra*, 155) and instructs it to attack the guilty (*nocens*) body which deserves more punishment:

Effringe corpus corque tot scelerum capax
evelle, totos viscerum nuda sinus;
fractum incitatis ictibus guttur sonet
laceraeve fixis unguibus venae fluant (159-62).

Whether these directives are simultaneously enacted, or whether the speech-act defers them, they nevertheless show the speaking, subjective self severed from the self objectively embodied. The most radical instance of the senecan verbal/visual split occurs at *Hercules Oetaeus* 1218-79, as Hercules traces the excruciating progress of the *pestis* through tissue and bone with a lucidity incompatible, in mimetic terms, with the total physical breakdown it describes: *Deficit ingens corpus, et pesti satis / Herculea non sunt membra* (1230-31). The third-person detachment relays ongoing trauma without sacrificing rhetorical effectiveness.[44]

[44] Macintosh (1994), 105 references similar divisions of the self at points of crisis in Greek tragedy.

Seneca uncouples the figures who are (verbally) represented from the body of the actor performing them. Early modern drama found this a fertile dramatic resource; as Weimann argues, 'Elizabethan theatre appears… to thrive on the non-identity between performer and script, between the actor's body and the author's language.'[45] Instead of merging with his role, the senecan actor remains conscious of his own artifice, inviting the audience to share in maintaining a sophisticated illusion. Instances of metatheatrical self-awareness affirm this mutual complicity.[46] Impossibly articulate under duress, the actor in a senecan drama continues to spiel out a third-person account of his agony, detaching the speaking "I" from its bodily referent. Reconciling incompatible verbal and visual information thus becomes a significant part of the audience's experience.

**Excess**

Even as senecan language strives for representational accuracy, its referents recede. Paradoxically, the more it expresses, the less it reveals, suggesting that even at its most tortured, language remains inadequate to the task of communicating the unspeakable. This leads to another aspect of the senecan aesthetic, its preoccupation with overload, overflow and excess. *Thyestes*' paradigmatic cannibal banquet literalises the motif of perverted or over-consumption. Opening with Tantalus, taunted by eternal inability to reach the fruits that inflame his hunger and thirst (152-75), its presiding genius is the insatiable Atreus, filled with the desire to commit a crime which will be *maius et solito amplius / supraque fines moris humani* (267-68). Even when he reaches the apparent culmination of his revenge, he yearns for more: *bene est, abunde est, sat est etiam mihi. / Sed cur satis sit? Pergam!* (889-90). The finishing touch ought to be Thyestes' anagnorisis, but Atreus still finds that *hoc quoque exiguum est mihi* (1053). Like Atreus, Medea considers ordinary methods of revenge

[45] Weimmann (1991), 97.
[46] Schiesaro (2003); Lopez (2003); Boyle (1997).

unsatisfactory: *parva sunt mala / et vile telum est, ima quod tellus creat* (690-91). She urges herself to seek out a novel punishment, commensurate with the Argo's audacity (*poenarum genus / haud usitatum*, 899-900). Driving herself on (*perage*, 987), she discovers that even a double infanticide is too limited in scale (*nimium angustus*, 1011).

Seneca's most common figures of speech, adopted by later drama for its own purposes, are hyperbole and pleonasm, or what Renaissance commentators referred to as *copia*:[47] a superabundance of synonyms, illustrative *exempla*, or cumulative asyndeton. The humanist scholar Erasmus shows how the simple sentence *He is a monster* may be enriched through expansion, displaying its constituent parts:

> Whatever part of the mind or body you will consider, you will find a monster – quivering head, rabid eyes, a dragon's gape, the visage of a Fury, distended belly, hands like talons ready to tear… Observe that tongue, observe that wild beast's roar (*De Copia* 2.1, trans. Thompson).

Compare the monster in Seneca's *Phaedra* emerging from the sea, which elaborates Euripides' simple ταῦρον, ἄγριον τέρας (*Hipp*. 1214) into a description of the creature's vast scaly body, its muscled neck and flaming eyes, the weed dripping from its flanks and the long tail dragging in the surf (*Phaed*. 1035-49).[48] *Copia* is also evident in Seneca's geographical or mythological catalogues, such as the collapsing constellations in *Thyestes* (835-74), the destinations of Hippolytus' hunting party (*Phaed*. 1-30, cf. 58-72), the ingredients of Medea's poison (705-30, 771-83) or the Trojan women's survey of Greek islands (814-57; Euripides'

[47] Erasmus, *Copia* 1.2 defines it as the art of expansion on a topic, or the opposite of abridgment; 1.3, 'verbal luxuriance', or 'fullness of diction'. 1.7: 'Richness of expression involves synonyms, heterosis or enallage, metaphor, variation in word form, equivalence, and similar methods of diversifying diction. Richness of subject matter involves… comparisons, dissimilarities, opposites, and other like procedures', such as metaphor (1.16-17) and hyperbole (1.28). (Trans. Thompson).

[48] Segal (1984), 318 comments that 'Euripides' monster is still a bull, whereas Seneca's is a strange phantasmagorical composite.'

corresponding *Troades* 196-229 is far more selective). Another application of *copia* occurs at *Oedipus* 180-201, the chorus' account of plague symptoms. Unlike Sophocles' understated νόσος, Seneca's is a *dira novi facies leti / gravior leto* (180-81). Lassitude and fever are followed by pustules (184), haemorrhage (189-90), and above all a burning heat that feeds on the internal organs (*pascitur artus*) and drives its victims, like a version of Tantalus, to increase their thirst by gorging on the water they crave: *aliturque sitis latice ingesto* (196). This is underscored by the insatiable desires of the gods themselves, who have gone beyond mere prayers and can only be appeased (*satiare*, 201) by human offerings, the crowds crawling up to die in their shrines. As in *Thyestes*, *copia* appears in conjunction with an assertion of the impossibility of achieving fulfilment, even in abundance.

Hyperbole swells the exaggerated language with which afflicted characters describe their circumstances and abilities: *aequalis astris gradior,* exults Atreus (*Thy*. 885); *te per undas perque Tartareos lacus, / per Styga, per amnes igneos amens sequar*, Phaedra vows (*Phaed*. 1179-80). Medea will use her powers to declare war on the gods and shatter the whole world: *sternam et evertam omnia* (*Med*. 414). The "inflation" apparent in senecan discourse also derives from its suspension of dramatic time during impressionistic episodes such as Medea's dilation upon her *odium* (*Med*. 397-425) or Oedipus' encounter with the Sphinx (*Oed*. 92-102).

Later playwrights not only adopted but further exaggerated senecan excess. Braden refers to Racine's account of Hippolytus' death, for example, as 'more Senecan than Seneca.'[49] Writing in the senecan mode provided later playwrights with a license to push discursive boundaries, exploring the possibilities afforded by extended monologues, stylised diction, and episodes dwelling morbidly on physical distress. *Hercules Oetaeus* again indicates which features in the Senecan corpus were recognised as readily imitable. Hercules'

[49] Braden (1985), 135; Binns (1974), 228: 'the writers of these [i.e. early modern] plays are trying to out-Seneca Seneca.'

stature and his boasts resemble Juno's caricature of his arrogance that opens the *Furens*. Deianira's rage, which drives her to roam the house like a tiger or a maenad and *queritur implorat gemit* (*HO* 253), reproduces Medea's (*Med*. 390). She urges her reluctant spirit on to revenge in the vein of Atreus or Clytemnestra (*HO* 307-12). In *Hercules Oetaeus*, the monologues are longer, the pain more protracted, and the classic Senecan keywords – *dolor, furor, fulmen, flamma, scelus, sanguis, perge* – are slotted into classic Senecan figures of speech such as *adynata* (335-38), extended natural similes (eg. 380-87), and choppy stichomythia. Just as Victorian authors could use classical Greek texts as a medium for indirectly addressing sexual taboos such as homoeroticism,[50] so early modern (and later) playwrights found in Seneca's style a convenient springboard from which to launch their own, sometimes even more lurid investigations into nihilism, corruption, and self-destructive insatiability.

**Metatheatre**

Another example of a runaway senecan trope is metatheatricality. This aspect of Seneca's dramaturgy has been frequently remarked upon:[51] the plays' self-conscious representation of their own theatrical mechanisms, performance taking as its subject matter the act of performance itself. In *Troades*, for example, the Greek army assemble to witness Polyxena's sacrifice like spectators in a natural amphitheatre (*vallis includens locum crescit theatri more, Tro*. 1124-25); Medea rejoices in the arrival of Jason, her ideal spectator, without whose presence and gaze her revenge would be incomplete (*derat hoc unum mihi / spectator iste, Med*. 992-93); and Atreus, having set his brother up to feature in the denouement of his revenge-plot, would ideally coerce the gods to watch (*utinam quidem tenere fugientes deos / possem et coactos trahere, ut ultricem dapem / omnes viderent, Thy*. 892-94). *Libet videre*

[50] Jenkyns (1980), esp. 280-93.
[51] Boyle (1997), esp. 112-37; Schiesaro (2003).

(903), he gloats, as he orders his *familiares* to display the glutted king in a gesture which commentators since Lessing have recognised as a prime example of self-reflexive stagecraft.[52] In *Hercules Furens*, the theatre is figured as the Underworld and attendance as a form of katabasis when the stream of mortals hastening towards death is compared to an audience hastening *ad novi ludos avidus theatri* (*HF* 839).

Like other senecan devices, metatheatre creates a distancing effect, not quite in the sense of Brechtian *Verfremdung* but certainly casting medium and materials into relief, highlighting the disjunction between the performer's bodily presence and the figure ostensibly portrayed. Its application in early modern drama has been much discussed,[53] particularly in the context of revenge tragedy where it undergoes manifest expansion into elaborate set-piece episodes such as Hieronymo's multilingual divertissement, Hamlet's *Mouse-Trap*, and Vindice's parodic double masque.[54] This process illustrates not only how Senecan kernels germinated in early modern receptions, but how readings of Seneca as a metatheatrical playwright have been informed and mediated by early modern dramaturgy. Metatheatre is such a diffuse practice that it otherwise becomes difficult to identify as senecan in later drama, particularly because of its equally profound root-system in comedy.[55] Its presence in Seneca is undeniable, but its activation as a component of the senecan aesthetic, flourishing in the atmosphere of conscious, collaborative self-delusion generated within the playhouse, occurs primarily in the sixteenth century.

**Delirium**

Roland Mayer comments on *Phaedra* that 'In the end, nothing in this play is immune from madness,'[56] echoing the chorus' conclusion that no-one can resist the onslaught of Eros (*nihil*

[52] Lessing, *Von den Lateinischen Trauerspielen* (1973) [1754], 120.
[53] Boyle (1997), esp. 193-212; Lopez (2003).
[54] Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* 4.4; Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 2.2 & 3.2; Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy* 5.3.
[55] Tarrant (1978); Dupont (2007), 189-241.
[56] Mayer (2002), 44.

*immune est*, 353).[57] Episodes of delusion or hallucination are sometimes acted out, metonymically crystallizing – like Thyestes' meal – an ever-present feature of senecan poetics. The most prominent victim is Hercules (*HF* 939-1002), who hallucinates cosmic disturbances, the resurgence of the Titans, and a Gigantomachy before casting his own wife as Juno (*teneo novercam*, 1018) and his own son as one of her monstrous offspring (*parvulum monstrum*, 1020). As Shelton has noted, Hercules' madness does not take arbitrary form, but plays out a misdirected version of the conquests he has already performed.[58] Cassandra likewise gives a verbal account of visions only she can "see", inviting the audience to collude in constructing an alternative fictional reality to that imposed on the stage-space by the dialogue of other characters. *Ecce* (728), *cerno* (730), *quae versat oculos alia nunc facies meos* (737), *video* (745), *spectate* (758), *et ecce* (769): Cassandra calls attention to the evident discrepancy between sight and sound, reproducing this common senecan feature in a particularly concentrated form. The Senecan delusion which acquired most subsequent currency, however, is Medea's: vacillating between love and revenge, she is pushed over the edge by a vision of her murdered brother flanked by Furies:

> Quonam ista tendit turba Furiarum impotens?
> Quem quaerit aut quo flammeos ictus parat,
> aut cui cruentas agmen infernum faces
> intentat? Ingens anguis excusso sonat
> tortus flagello. Quem trabe infesta petit
> Megaera? Cuius umbra dispersis venit
> incerta membris? Frater est, poenas petit (*Med*. 958-64).

[57] See Davis (1983).
[58] Shelton (1978), 63-66 & 78-80.

Visions of Megaera and/or former victims become a staple manifestation of the murderer's remorse or the revenger's conscience in later drama.[59]

Like Medea, Hercules and Cassandra are described as gripped by *furor*.[60] Although Phaedra also relates delusions (110-11, 394-403), it is her erotic fixation which she refers to as *furor* (112, 178). This fixatedness, this obsessive return, also characterizes senecan drama, which proceeds less through plot than through a series of distended episodes, subordinating events to atmosphere.[61] This *modus operandi*, termed 'lyric tragedy' by Gioia, 'seeks to capture with compelling exactitude a single, intensely unified experience.'[62] It appears in the anagnorises in *Oedipus* (868-78), *Thyestes* (1006-21 & 1069-96) *Phaedra* (1201-43) and *Hercules Furens* (1202-29), where protagonists call on the universe to swallow them up and the indifferent gods to strike them down; the moment of realization and the agony of guilt is expressed as a protracted fantasy of retribution. A condition of hyperreality prevails throughout Seneca's work, maintained by the repetition of keywords,[63] the constant intrusion of simile,[64] the vivid evocation of a physical and metaphysical context,[65] and the ability of central figures to draw all events into their personal orbit.[66] It becomes difficult for the senecan auditor – or spectator – to keep a grip on what constitutes fictional reality, and what is "merely" hallucinatory. The plays explore aberrant states of mind and induce moral and aesthetic disorientation in an audience who, like the rest of Nature, lack immunity to passion.

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[59] e.g. La Péruse, *Médée* (1166-67); Gager, *Meleager* 1170-79; [Peele], *Locrine* III.vi & V.iv; Garnier, *Hippolyte* (1183ff & 2250ff); Kyd, *Spanish Tragedy* (III.xiii.138-63); Alabaster, *Roxana* V.v.1614-26; Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (III.iv.104-39); Hardy, *Mariamne* (V.v.1612-14); Goffe, *Orestes* IV.vii & V.iv; Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (V.i.78-103); Marston, *Antonio's Revenge* (III.i); Lee, *The Massacre of Paris* (V.v.14-16).

[60] *Ag*. 775; *HF*. 991; *Med*. 852. For a definition of Senecan *furor*, see Dupont (1995), 71-84.

[61] Mendell (1941), 67 calls the tragedies 'tone poems'; Whitton (1987), 161 observes their construction of a 'theatrical universe where the creation of a climate, often violent, takes precedence over the expression of an idea.'

[62] Gioia (1992-95), xxxvi. Cartwright (1999), 116 identifies in *Gorboduc* similar 'moments of suspended time in which a character experiences a kind of transcendence or fixation.'

[63] Mastronarde (1970); Pratt (1963); Owen (1968).

[64] e.g. *Phaed*. 101-03 (Phaedra as Aetna); *Phaed*. 580-82 (Hippolytus as a cliff-face); *Thy*. 497-503 (Atreus as a hunting-dog).

[65] e.g. *Oed*. 37-51 (the landscape of plague), *Ag*. 421-578 (the shipwreck), *HF* 662-827 (the Underworld ecphrasis).

[66] This happens to Atreus, Medea, Oedipus, Hercules and Phaedra.

**Possession**

Entering these states of delusion or passion typically involves surrender to an external force which deprives the subject of agency: effectively, a form of possession. Even as Atreus and Medea impose their will on others, they lack autonomy. *Rapior,* Atreus marvels at his own depravity, *et quo nescio, / sed rapior* (*Thy*. 261-62). As Joe Park Poe comments, 'Atreus is affected by a madness which is beyond the control of his conscious mind… He is, indeed, driven by *aliquid novi*… in a state of mental transport.'[67] Phaedra, too, recognizes that she is acting contrary to moral sense and even her own wishes, but *furor cogit sequi peiora* […] *Quid ratio possit? Vicit ac regnat furor* (178-79, 184). The prologues to *Agamemnon*, *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens* suggest that these are not mere pretexts for immorality, but that Seneca's characters do in fact operate in a universe where external forces exert absolute authority. Zanobi writes that 'Each emotion is described as an active agent with almost an independent life of its own which, in turn, possesses… [the character's] body.'[68] This sometimes involves literal possession: Atreus calls on the Erinys of his house, already personified in the prologue, to take him over (*non satis magno meum / ardet furore pectus, impleri iuvat / maiore monstro*, 252-54). Medea likewise offers herself as a vessel for revenge (*fige luminibus faces, / lania, perure, pectus en Furiis patet*, 965-66), and Juno begs the *famulae Ditis* to destabilize her mind sufficiently to madden Hercules in his turn (*Me, me, sorores, mente deiectam mea / versate primam*, 110-11). A.W. Schlegel's pejorative description of Seneca's characters as *Marionetten* is not, in this respect, altogether inaccurate.[69] At the mercy of unremitting passion (*furor*), the senecan body becomes instrument, rather than agent, unable to exercise independent will, the conscious self

[67] Poe (1969), 383.
[68] Zanobi (2008b), 114.
[69] Schlegel (1846) [1815], 210. The passage is discussed in Ch. 6 of this thesis.

becoming a passive third-party observer as crimes are committed by the suffering flesh in its name.[70]

Antonin Artaud's assertion that 'all the great myths of the past cloak pure forces,' and that this is what a ritual theatre should aim to represent,[71] seems applicable to this aspect of senecanism. Seneca shows the behaviour not of characters on a realistic, interpersonal scale, but rather of superhuman figures who are not heroic so much as monstrous in their language and confrontations. Herington argues that Seneca is concerned with 'representations of passion in people and things', in other words with showing the damage wrought by rage, desire, aggrandizement and the unchecked exercise of power running like a current through helpless human hosts.[72] Susan Sontag notices a similar quality in Peter Weiss' Artaudian *Marat/Sade,* which she calls 'a kind of theatre focused not on characters, but on intense transpersonal emotions borne by characters.'[73] Instead of tragedies of action, in which catastrophe results from the discrepancy between intention and result,[74] senecanism produces tragedies of passion which show the human subject uncannily unable to make her body her own.

Christopher Gill finds this aspect of senecanism inexplicable. 'Although audiences, ancient and modern, can be envisaged as identifying with powerful representations of evil,' he writes, 'it is less easy to see why one should engage with internal conflict, "feverish" instability, tortuous reasoning, and the kind of "madness" which Medea induces in herself.'[75] From other perspectives, however, the masochistic impulse – particularly as a staged

[70] Gill (1997), 220-22 notes this division of the self but regards passion as psychological rather than an external force.
[71] Artaud (1964) vol. II, 185-87.
[72] Herington (1966), 448: 'He is not trying… to present the actions of human beings. His emphasis is on the action of Evil, and of the emotions which generate it; the human actors, the palaces, the landscapes, the starry heavens themselves are subordinate to this action; they are its external manifestations.'
[73] Sontag (1965), 168.
[74] Sophocles' *Oedipus,* for example, which according to Dodds (1983), 182-84 shows 'a man freely choosing, from the highest motives, a series of actions which lead to his own ruin.'
[75] Gill (2006), 435; on identifying with the Senecan villain, cf. Schiesaro (2003).

phenomenon – is not unattractive.[76] A character such as Orestes, or Hamlet, or Beatrice Cenci, who becomes both perpetrator and victim, allows the audience to vacillate between identifying with subject- and object-positions and to indulge the fantasy of receiving as well as inflicting blows.[77] In suspending personal agency, the senecan aesthetic suspends personal responsibility, approaching the desired loss of self and self-consciousness which attends the masochist's 'leap into corporeality'.[78] Senecanism thus engages with the scandal of pleasurable pain.

**Abjection**

The willful abandonment of self-control generates what Michael Goldman terms the 'histrionics of ravishment' operating in Marlowe's plays, particularly *Tamburlaine*. 'To give oneself up to ravishment,' writes Goldman, 'is a state of dissolution, an assuagement, an expansion beyond gravity.'[79] Within the senecan aesthetic, this impulse towards entropy is embedded, according to Charles Segal, in 'sensations that exploit our fundamental horror at the violation of the boundaries of our physical being.'[80] Such violation may indeed provoke horror or disgust, but it can equally appeal to prurient fascination, nostalgia for a pre-conscious physicality, or a yearning to transcend these physical boundaries via absorption, ingestion, penetration or other compromises of integrity that destabilize the conventional isomorphism of the internally and externally constituted self. Kristeva's concept of the "abject", matter which originates within the subject (me), but then has the capacity to become a separate substance (not-me) – such as blood, semen, mucus, faeces, usually liquid and ideally contained – applies to both the compromised, leaking body of horror and the

[76] Hart (1998); Helms (1997).
[77] Benton (2002) examines the impulse towards masochistic identification in *Troades*; compare Leigh (1997) on the dynamics of spectatorship in Lucan.
[78] Hart (1998), 60.
[79] Goldman (1977), 36.
[80] Segal (1983), 249. On the abject in Seneca, see also Dupont (1995), 223-29.

compromised, leaking body of comedy. Such bodies are gratuitous and excessive, flaunting their corporeality with carnivalesque disregard for decorum.[81] Thyestes' distended stomach and libidinous gluttony belong in a different genre, rudely announcing their intrusion into tragic propriety with an (in)appropriate sound effect: *eructat* (911). Stuffed to the gills (*satur est*, 913) and carousing drunkenly (913-19), Thyestes goes on to talk openly about the state of his digestion (*quis hic tumultus viscera agitat mea*, 999) and at one point actually seems on the verge of vomiting (*Volvuntur intus viscera, et clausum nefas / sine exitu luctatur et quaerit fugam*, 1041-42).

A less indecorous but still grotesquely literal icon of interior/exterior confusion is Hippolytus' corpse, mutilated to such an extent that not only does nothing remain of his celebrated *forma*, but he has become altogether unrecognizable. *Quo tuus fugit decor*? (1173), mourns Phaedra, and Theseus is unable even to reconstruct the disparate limbs:

> Hoc quid est forma carens
> et turpe, multo vulnere abruptum undique?
> Quae pars tui sit dubito, sed pars est tui.
> Hic, hic repone, non suo, at vacuo loco (1265-68).

Much is made of the scattered condition of Hippolytus' body, which has more in common with Pentheus' following Bacchic *sparagmos* than that of Euripides' injured but still coherent young hero. His remains are *errantes* (1257) and *vagas* (1278), *disiecta* (1256) and *dispersa* (1246), *sparsi per agros* (1209). The human body is here reduced to components and deprived of the formal unity which now appears at the very least transient and unreliable, if not downright illusory.

[81] Kristeva (1982), following Douglas (1966), 141-59 on 'the power residing in the margins of the body' and their transgression.

The anxiety about borders, dispersal and infinite or indefinite expansion may perhaps be related to anxieties associated with apparently unchecked imperialism. *Nil qua fuerat sede reliquit / pervius orbis* (371-72), frets Medea's chorus.

> Venient annis saecula seris,
> quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
> laxet, et ingens pateat tellus,
> Tethysque novos detegat orbes
> nec sit terris ultima Thule (375-79).

In *Oedipus*, too, plague attacks a civilization whose representatives have dared to plant their flag in Arabia and India (*Oed*. 113-24). The chorus in *Hercules Furens* celebrate a sun that never sets on the *pax herculea* (*HF* 882-90), but the hubris of such wholesale pacification has been spelled out by Juno (*HF* 30-74) and will rebound on the hero who has no realm left to conquer. Seneca's work is full of compromised borders, both somatic and conceptual, as the inside spills out and the outside pours in, confounding the principle of autonomy.

**Horror**

A related aspect of senecanism is its preoccupation with the macabre and recourse to fear as an emotional stimulant. Joe Park Poe calls this 'literary necrophilia… a love of what is beautiful in its repulsiveness, desirable in its horror.'[82] This exploration of the death-drive, or what Seneca in his moral philosopher's role calls *libido moriendi* (*Ep*. 24.25), manifests in a number of ways: the constant presence of ghosts and the Underworld, the intimation (*pace Troades* 371-409) that even death brings no termination of suffering, the collusion of *Natura*

[82] Poe (1969), 358-59.

and the gods in producing intolerable conditions – as in *Phaedra* or *Oedipus* – or even the complete absence of divine regulation: Jason's notorious final curse on Medea, *testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos* (1027), appears axiomatic for the whole Senecan corpus.[83] In place of divine machinery, the diabolical takes over.

Supernatural instigation, represented by Tantalus in *Thyestes* or Thyestes himself in *Agamemnon* - in addition to the reported apparitions in *Oedipus* and *Troades* - becomes indispensable to the senecan aesthetic, from the ghost of Agrippina in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia* right down to Hamlet's father. Alexander Heywood decided that a reported ghost was insufficiently senecan, and remedied this in his 1559 translation of *Troades* by having Achilles deliver his own posthumous demands. Similarly, Corneille and Dryden both supplemented their respective versions of *Oedipus* with a speaking role for the ghost of Laius. More than just an end in itself, the senecan ghost contributes to the sense that even metaphysical borders are permeable, and any certainty that the domains of life and death are mutually exclusive collapses. Juno brings the Underworld onstage, declaring *hic tibi ostendam inferos*, *HF*. 91), a prediction fulfilled by Theseus' ecphrasis of Hades; Theseus similarly mediates between worlds in *Phaedra* (835-49, 1201-42). Ghosts come swarming to the surface at *Oedipus* (160-72, 559-618) and *Thyestes* (665-679), and Cassandra summons the dead to act as spectral spectators (*Ag*. 741-74). In *Phoenissae*, the opposite occurs, and Oedipus becomes a walking corpse, referring to his body as a *cadaver* (*Phoen*. 36), a wandering shade who ought to complete the act of suicide he began long ago (*Phoen*. 181, 234-36). It is not only violence which darkens the senecan aesthetic, but a nightmare cycle in which the dead return, the past recurs, and the living are subsumed.

[83] Garton (1959), 7 calls this 'substituting the merely supernatural for the numinous'.

**Confinement**

Senecan horror is located in enclosed spaces, in the *unheimlich* ("Uncanny") centre of the *domus* where ancestral history lies buried (for example, *Thy*. 648-82), and in the body itself, the *intima viscera* that can so easily turn on their host, become estranged, or develop a life of their own.[84] Danger typically resides in the domestic interior.[85] Returning from the Underworld, both Hercules and Theseus discover greater suffering in the implosion of their own households (*Phaed*. 850-53, 1213-19; *HF*. 1143-46), and both prefer Hades' torments to the ensuing guilt and loss (*Phaed*. 1217-19; *HF*. 1218). Meanwhile, immense forces are brought to bear on individuals, the macrocosm finding microcosmic expression: Medea is no mere survivor (*Medea superest*), but *Hic mare et terras vides, ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina* (166-67). This concentrates volatile energies within a small space and intersects with the typically senecan trope of drawing environmental attributes into sympathetic union with human activity. There is no alternative world elsewhere, and the plays follow a relentlessly centripetal trajectory. Hippolytus tries to flee (*O silvae, o ferae*!, *Phaed*. 718) but the wilderness affords no refuge; drawn back to Argos, Thyestes cannot resist reverting to royal *luxuria* (*Thy*. 909-10); Hercules can find no part of the earth where he has not left his mark (*ubique notus perdidi exilio locum*, *HF*. 1331). Even Medea's flight is figured not as escape, but return, as she reclaims her lost virginity (*rediere regna, rapta virginitas redit*, 984) and dissolves herself into the pre-existing role of "Medea" (*Medea nunc sum*, 910; *coniugem agnoscis tuam? / Sic fugere soleo*, 1021-22).[86]

Levitan connects this feeling of entrapment to the senecan obsession with cyclicity and the eternal return of the past. 'If hell consists of sheer continuation,' Levitan writes in regard to Racine's *Phèdre*, 'of activity emptied of significance by endless repetition and the prospect of completion endlessly receding, so too does the compulsive structure of action in

[84] On the Uncanny as a literary concept, see Royle (2003).
[85] On *oikos* as dangerous interior in Greek tragedy, see e.g. Zeitlin (1985), 72-74; Padel (1990).
[86] For comment see Fyfe (1983); Nussbaum (1997); Boyle (1997).

Senecan tragedy constitute in itself a kind of Hell.'[87] *Phaedra* displays a particular concern with enclosure and suppression, symbolised by the Cretan labyrinth in which the Minotaur, evidence of deviance (*nostra monstra*, 122) was incarcerated. Secrecy governs the structure of both language and dramatic plot in both *Phaedra* and *Oedipus*, *praeteritio* being the main figure of speech: Phaedra's circumspection in approaching Hippolytus, for example (*Phaed.* 602-71), or the extended haruspicy which translates the progressive exposure of Oedipus' identity into signs of disorder, rotting inside the carcass of the sacrificial beast (*Oed.* 314-83). Andromache's concealment of Astyanax in Hector's tomb likewise uses enclosure to symbolise the oppression of family history. Prematurely buried, the child goes to join his father's ashes, making Andromache's fatal decision no decision at all: *utrimque est Hector* (*Tro.* 659).[88] Interiors offer no protection, but rather an intensification of menace. As Gareth Lloyd Evans observes, 'Of all Shakespeare's plays, *Titus Andronicus* is the one most readily compatible with Seneca's mode… It has… that bunched up, walled-in, claustrophobic privacy of horror and cruelty characteristic of the classical writer.'[89] Enclosure likewise becomes a prevalent device throughout gothic melodrama, where the vast (Sublime) wilderness alternates with imprisonment in the inescapable cell.[90] This trope is not exclusive to Seneca, but nevertheless characteristic of the senecan aesthetic.

***Sympatheia***

It has long been recognised that Senecan characters have a reciprocal affinity with their environment. What has not been considered is how this relates to performance, wherein 'language and space are essentially interdependent.'[91] While the structures of spatial

[87] Levitan (1989), 197.
[88] On making Andromache's choice, see Volk (2000).
[89] Lloyd Evans (1965), 137.
[90] Ranger (1991), 17-20.
[91] McAuley (1999), 51.

perception in Greek tragedy have been widely discussed,[92] Seneca's have not. The conclusions drawn by Charles Segal in his post-Freudian study of *Phaedra*'s landscapes as psychopathological projections may be applied across the corpus.[93] At the same time, Seneca's representation of landscapes and settings may be interpreted according to a general taxonomy of theatrical space. Essentially, theatre consists of three superimposed spatial layers: scenic space (the material surroundings and equipment taken up by a performance); mimetic space (the imagined setting of the action); and diegetic space (offstage locations made present through verbal representation).[94] Senecan text contains a high proportion of what Issacharov terms 'diegetic' space. This has sometimes been interpreted as embellishment, but it should more properly be regarded as a continuation – even an escalation – of dramatic action by other means.

For all that this conflict is ostensibly concentrated in a single setting, the offstage world permeates it throughout. Senecan discourse is full of spatial features, whether establishing setting (as in *Troades*), appealing to the moral associations of Roman landscape (city versus country, local versus foreign), or mapping an imaginary location such as the Underworld. One can add to these extended passages the similes, the *adynata*, the place-names that anchor figures of speech to definite geography (*non tot caducas educat frondes Eryx… / Nec tanta gelidi Strymonis fugiens minas / permutat hiemes ales et caelum secans / tepente Nilo pensat Arctoas nives*, *Oed*. 600-06), the appeals to gods to overturn the universe (for example *Thy*. 1068-96 or *Phaed*. 671-84), and the persistent association of characters with spatial themes such as exile or exploration. Integrated into senecan theatre via the medium of embodied speech, global space takes on the properties of a character; that is, a fictional entity that must find expression through the physical and vocal orientation of the actor/s onstage. Segal reads the immanence of landscape and cosmology in Senecan

[92] Examples include Taplin (1977) and (1978), Wiles (2003), Padel (1990), Rehm (2002), Kuntz (1993).
[93] Segal (1986).
[94] Issacharov (1981). For more detailed taxonomies of theatrical space see McAuley (1999) and Carlson (1989).

discourse as reflecting an individual character's psychological composition, '*projecting* personal emotion into a cosmic frame.'[95] This reading implies that any connection perceived between the human self and the natural world involves the deluded investment of global events with personal significance. For Segal, tragedy's surrounding 'macrocosm' (Nature) offsets its 'microcosm' (the dramatic persona).[96] Boyle, similarly, refers to this as 'the capacity of [Seneca's] characters to appropriate the universe in their process of self-dramatisation.'[97] All these readings, however, overlook the performative dimension. Unlike literature, which can allow intimate events to remain segregated from the 'hyperbolic' universe surrounding them, Seneca performed is compelled to express micro- and macro-space using the same instrument: the performer's body. Depicting a landscape in dramatic (rhetorical) form should not necessarily be regarded as subordinate to depicting a human figure.

Many scholars, in particular Rosenmeyer, have argued that this responsive *Natura* – diseased in *Oedipus*, erotic in *Phaedra*, malevolent in *Medea* – relates to the Stoic doctrine of *sympatheia*, whereby the microcosm of the self expresses the macrocosm of the whole.[98] Oedipus, according to Joe Park Poe's reading, is in this respect not the *cause* of the plague afflicting Thebes, but rather its primary symptom,[99] whose departure drains the city's sore (*mortifera mecum vitia terrarum extraho*, 1058). This is of course morally problematic: if Senecan characters represent slices of *Natura*, and behave in cruel or inhuman ways, does this imply that they (we) inhabit a cruel, inhuman universe? And how is this to be reconciled with the benevolent *Natura* of orthodox Stoicism?[100] Although important questions for Senecan scholarship overall, these issues have bearing on the present discussion only insofar

[95] Segal (2008), 137; emphasis added.
[96] Segal (2008), 141-42.
[97] Boyle (1997), 29.
[98] Pratt (1963); Poe (1969) & (1983); Segal (1986); Rosenmeyer (1989).
[99] Poe (1983).
[100] Pratt (1948), Fyfe (1983), Rosenmeyer (1989), Nussbaum (1997) and Bartsch (2006) propose various solutions.

as they take as their common point of departure the evident resonance between persona and context, creating dramatic figures inseparable from their ground.

*Sympatheia* informs the senecan aesthetic in three interrelated ways. One is the verbal construction of a fictional world which is corrupted and/or hostile, and in this respect congruent with the human activity it contains. Stylistically, this entails the establishment of appropriate diegetic space. This can either be concentrated into a single symbolic location, such as the *locus horridus* in *Thyestes* (650-81), *Oedipus* (530-47), *Titus Andronicus* (2.3.91-108) and *The Cenci* (244-65); or it can be sown throughout the play, like the references to enclosure in Racine's *Bajazet* or the oppressive heat in Tony Harrison's *Phaedra Britannica*. Marcus Wilson describes senecan writing as suffering a form of psychosis: 'it strives to forge connections between different events, figures and ideas, and therefore maximize their potential meaningfulness.'[101] One method of yoking discrepant concepts is this fusion of internal and external qualities into chains of metaphor.[102] It is these linguistic chains which constitute both "character" and "environment", melding them into a single, dehumanized referent to be expressed by the senecan performer.

In the first chapter of this thesis, *Roman Contexts*, I analyse the first-century environment of Seneca's plays and revisit the performance debate in light of available data pertaining to Roman theatrical venues and presentational modes. Both sides of the debate have in the past tended to assume full-scale production as the default, whether cataloguing the plays' continuity errors (as do Zwierlein and Fantham, for example) or reconstructing

[101] Wilson (1983), 37.
[102] Henderson (1983), 98-99: 'Cumulative resonance establishes dominant imagery, rhetoric creates a textual continuum between character and myth, psyche and cosmos […] The vignettes of death, fire, flood, females and families are strung into a cumulatively reverberating vortex of disaster and at the same time an elegantly eloquent tapestry patterned by the dominant metaphor-forces of the play.'

their scenic topography (as do Sutton and Marshall).[103] This phase of the debate has more or less burnt itself out, but although consensus now favours some form of performance,[104] its characteristics remain vague. This chapter examines two of the likeliest Roman performance media for plays like Seneca's in terms of their capacity for *affectus* and corporeal involvement. I argue first that *recitatio* should be redeemed as a serious form of vocal – and consequentially, physical – performance;[105] I then follow Alessandra Zanobi and Bernhard Zimmermann in considering Senecan text as material for *fabulae salticae*, or libretti for tragic pantomime.[106] In both cases, it is the power relationship established in these media, resulting in a radical disconnect between voice and body, which generates the senecan aesthetic.

The second chapter, *The Open Book*, begins by discussing the extracurricular performance of neo-Latin drama in universities during the sixteenth century, addressing the assimilation of Senecan diction and senecan tropes into plays such as William Gager's *Meleager* and James Calfhill's *Progne*. In doing so it builds on the source material analysed by Frederick Boas and more recently by Howard Norland.[107] As a practical complement to the classroom study of rhetorical delivery (*actio*), neo-Latin tragedy enabled students to apply their formal training, and as such required sustained physical commitment. Realising its pedagogical goals entailed the permanent alteration of the student's body into a trained and pliant vocal instrument. At the same time as exerting a hold over auditors, rhetoric shaped the bodies of those who practised it. Playing Seneca could be a valuable means of instilling

[103] For the affirmative: Herington (1966); Braun (1982); Davis (1993) & (2003); Dupont (1995); Boyle (1997) & (2006); Sutton (1986) and Harrison (ed.) (2000), especially Marshall's chapter in this volume. Recent work on Senecan metatheatre by Schiesaro (2003) and Littlewood (2004) addresses the texts' theatricality in the abstract without becoming embroiled in questions of stagecraft. For the negative: Zwierlein (1966); Fantham (1982) and (2000); Coffey & Mayer (1990); Mayer (2002). Some of these arguments are repeated by Hall (2005), 63. Among the earlier critics acknowledged by Zwierlein as contributing to his study are Nisard (1834); Leo (1878); Boissier (1861); and Beare (1945).

[104] Fitch (2002) follows Calder (1976) in envisaging private performance. Kelly (1979) argues for a range of media, including tragic pantomime. Tarrant (1978) identifies Plautine elements in Seneca, but in his 1985 edition of *Thyestes* (pp13-15) argues that 'Senecan drama shows a lack of concern for theatrical realities' and favours private reading. Kragelund (2008) regards the whole debate as obsolete.

[105] De Romilly (1973) Tietze (1988).

[106] Zimmermann (2008); Zanobi (2008a).

[107] Boas (1914); Norland (2009). See also Smith (1988) for specific discussion of Seneca, and Cartwright (1999) for contextual background.

vocal dexterity in the young, but plays such as *Progne*'s successor *Titus Andronicus* and John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* explore the more sinister consequences of senecan self-fashioning.

The same properties that made Seneca such a well-tapped resource for academic theatre also flourished in the concurrent vernacular tradition. Chapter 3, *Seneca Goes Public*, compares the movement of Seneca from neo-Latin into the popular theatre as it occurred in sixteenth-century England and France.[108] In France, full translations of Seneca such as Garnier's *Hippolyte* appear in the repertoire of touring companies by the 1590s. In England, by contrast, the collected *Tenne Tragedies* (published in 1581) were never performed, and the senecan aesthetic found expression instead in plays with non-Senecan plots: in *Tamburlaine*'s Herculean hyperbole, for instance, or transpositions of the House of Atreus into Arthurian myth. By the first decade of the seventeenth century, as rhetorical theatre became an option rather than a default, Shakespeare began to use senecanism to rather different effect, as a foil or an index of failure.[109] By the 1630s, a similar transition had likewise taken place in France, accommodating Senecan plots to the spatial fluidity and mechanical ingenuity of the pre-regulation playhouse, as in Corneille's *Médée*.

Chapter 4, *The Great Repression*, examines Seneca's incorporation into French neoclassicism using Racine's *Phèdre* as a case study. Although evidently indebted to Seneca for *Phèdre*'s style and structure,[110] Racine in his preface denies the presence of the Roman dramatist, suppressing his monstrosity (as Levitan and Bold have argued) in the same way as the guilty secrets of Phèdre's family are buried deep in the labyrinth.[111] The motives for Racine's denial may be sought in the strictures of neoclassical theory, as disseminated by its

[108] Biet & Fragonard (2010), 6 attest to the importance of taking a comparative approach to European theatre of this period.
[109] Miola (1992).
[110] On Racine and Seneca: Tobin (1971) and Lapp (1973). In terms of a methodology for reading the performativity of Racine's language, I follow Phillips (1994) *contra* Maskell (1991).
[111] Levitan (1989); Bold (2001). Segal (1986) discusses the imagery of enclosure in *Phaedra*. See Barthes (1982) on the same imagery in *Phèdre*.

principal exponents Chapelain (1630) and D'Aubignac (1657). The embrace of Aristotelian precepts, and by extension Greek tragedy, accompanied the systematic expurgation of old-fashioned, "unregulated" rhetorical drama, and by extension Seneca.[112] Nevertheless, in *Phèdre*'s poetics of enclosure and in its thematic exploration of the vulnerability of *forma* (formal beauty), Racine reactivates two further aspects of the senecan aesthetic which acquire particular potency under conditions of repression.

Chapter 5, *Hypertragedy*, returns to English theatre and focuses on the corpus of Restoration tragedian Nathaniel Lee. Although one of the most popular dramatists of his time, Lee has been largely neglected by later scholarship.[113] His engagement with Seneca began with his first work, *Nero* (1674) and continued throughout his career, becoming particularly central to the *Oedipus* on which he collaborated with John Dryden (1678).[114] Lee's commitment to the senecan aesthetic is evident in his ongoing fascination with the poetics and dramaturgy of horror, and manifests most obviously in his use of hyperbole and in his repeated insistence that language affects the material world: wounding, corrupting, dissolving. Alongside this verbal overdrive, however, Lee also participated in the Restoration enthusiasm for spectacle and the grand reveal.[115] As the visual dimension of theatre overtook the aural, it was easier to administer horror in a shock to the eyes than in an assault on the ears.

Chapter 6, *Seneca Censored*, addresses this transition more fully with an explanation of why Seneca's popularity declined so profoundly during the eighteenth century.[116] Resulting from a combination of increasing commercialisation and popular demand for

[112] Bray (1951) discusses the development of neoclassicism, including its use of Aristotle. On Richelieu's program of theatrical rehabilitation, see Levi (2000) and Couton (1986).
[113] There is no monograph on his work apart from Grayham's 1935 biography. *Lucius Junius Brutus* has received some attention, e.g. Hayne (1996) and Kerrigan (2001).
[114] On *Oedipus* and the politics of the Exclusion Crisis see Hall & Macintosh (2005) and Macintosh (2009); Battigelli (2012); Owen (1996).
[115] Diamond (1989) shows how 'Women and Scenes', in Shadwell's phrase, catered to the masculine gaze.
[116] Major sources in this chapter are: Steiner (1961) for theoretical framework; DeBolla (1989) on rhetoric and the Sublime; DeRitter (1994) on the domestication of tragedy; West (1991) on changes in acting style; Marshall (1988) on sympathy; and Liesenfeld (1984) on censorship and the Licensing Act.

sympathetic, lifelike character portrayals, Seneca's crisis was exacerbated from Winckelmann onwards by the value judgements inherent in philhellenism.[117] While Gotthold Lessing was able in 1755 to indulge his *Antikemanie* with a study of *die Trauerspiele Senecas,*[118] by 1808 such an undertaking was unthinkable. The second part of this chapter assesses what has become the most notorious articulation of an anti-senecan position, A.W. Schlegel's categorical repudiation of Seneca's performability, dramatic effectiveness, and literary merit. I will also show, however, how this denunciation was contested by the senecanism revived in Heinrich von Kleist's contemporaneous *Penthesilea*.[119]

Even the most ardent philhellenists experimented with Seneca. Chapter 7, *Signalling Through the Flames,* identifies the senecan features activated in Percy Bysshe Shelley's gothic revenge tragedy *The Cenci*, which unlike other Romantic dramas declared itself intended for stage performance.[120] Aside from affinities in characterisation and verbal echoes, *The Cenci*'s most pronounced senecan feature is its treatment of theatrical discourse. Rather than proceeding via prosaic interactions in which literalism blunts the affective edge of language, Shelley's dialogue proceeds through vivid metaphor.[121] The crime at the centre of the play remains unspeakable, even as the elaborate, oblique references to it proliferate.[122] This chapter then turns to the 1935 production of *The Cenci* directed by Antonin Artaud, whose encounter with Seneca's tragedies had already contributed to his formulation of *Théâtre de la Cruauté*. *The Cenci* was Artaud's first (and final) attempt to demonstrate what he meant by 'Cruelty in the theatre'; as I argue here, his erroneous assumption that poetic

[117] Riedel (1996).
[118] The major discussion of this work is Barner (1973).
[119] On Kleist's relationship to mainstream philhellenism, see Mommsen (1974); on performing *Penthesilea*, see Holmström (1967), and Reeve (1993) on subsequent reception.
[120] Curran (1970) on *The Cenci*; Ranger (1991) on gothic drama.
[121] On Shelley's use of metaphor in *The Cenci* see Peterfreund (1991).
[122] On concealment versus disclosure see Simpson (1998) in terms of censorship; in terms of language, Endo (1996) and Worton (1982).

language cannot have physical impact led to both a betrayal of *The Cenci*'s senecanism and the collapse of his own vision.

Subsequent directors picked up where Artaud left off. Chapter 8, *Seneca in '68*, examines Jean-Louis Barrault's *Phèdre* (1942), Jorge Lavelli's *Medée* (1967) and Peter Brook's *Oedipus* (1968) as they re-applied the principles of Cruelty to verse translations of Seneca's plays. By the late 1960s, the groundwork was laid for a resurgence of the senecan aesthetic, evident in a cluster of productions around this time. Once again, however, various factors conspired to prevent the expansion of this miniature revival. The Artaudian mistrust of articulate speech drew avant-garde practitioners away from text-based theatre towards the so-called post-dramatic; and meanwhile the less rigid form and the more liberal associations of Greek tragedy lent it more readily to radical adaptation. As a result of these trends, accompanied by Zwierlein's influential reading of the tragedies as merely *Rezitationsdramen*,[123] Seneca's marginality remained almost unquestioned within the academy, the secondary status of his works apparently assured. This thesis seeks to challenge assumptions of Seneca's inferiority in terms, at least, of reception history.

Seneca has provided modern theatre since its inception with a prototype for articulating experiences so extreme or so incommunicable that their expression propels the dramatic form into a condition of hyperreality, inducing a state akin to delirium or hypnosis. Various terms may be applied to this condition. Walker & Henry refer to it as 'phantasmagoria', a surreal and inescapable nightmare.[124] Mendell calls Seneca's tragedies 'tone poems',[125] recognising (if not altogether appreciating) their stasis, their suspension of action while sense-impressions are elaborately dilated. According to Federici, the plays present an *orgie du macabre… La vision qui en sort est celle d'un paysage infernal*. She

[123] Zwierlein (1966).
[124] Henry & Walker (1966).
[125] Mendell (1941), 67.

terms this vision *réalisme sénéquien*,[126] suggesting that it represents a perception of reality stripped of its comforting quotidian insulation, occasioning a violent estrangement of internal consciousness from external matter, even the supposedly unified matter comprising the body. This resembles what Elaine Scarry calls the 'radical subjectivity' produced under intense physical trauma such as torture, in which 'pain takes over all that is inside and outside, makes the two obscenely indistinguishable.'[127] Senecan discourse operates more or less perpetually in this zone or on its borders, where the bounded self approaches dissolution and language ceases to declare autonomy. Theatre director Jean-Louis Barrault identifies particular passages where the text enters what he calls *l'état lyrique*, a state beyond hysteria in which the (iambic) pulse becomes rapid and the 'temperature' of the scene soars, whose crisis he compares to the weightlessness at the apex of a parabola.[128] *État lyrique*, radical subjectivity, *réalisme sénéquien*, tone poem, phantasmagoria: these are all, I will argue, alternative terms for the senecan aesthetic.

[126] ['An orgy of the macabre… a vision of the type that consists of a katabasis'.] Federici (1974), 13-14.
[127] Scarry (1985), 50-55.
[128] Barrault (1946), 59-61. During such a "*période*", *nous nous éloignons de la réalité prosaïque, nous submissons son influence hypnotique. Par elle la fièvre monte et le pouls bat plus fort*.

## Chapter 1

## ROMAN CONTEXTS

Dramatic text, when spoken aloud, instantly generates conditions of performance: a fictional entity is superimposed, albeit tempered by varying degrees of detachment or commitment, upon the speaker and his or her surroundings. This chapter situates Seneca's texts within the cultural matrix which initially produced them. In respect to the plays' political content, this chapter is not concerned with their relationship to Julio-Claudian ideology,[1] but rather how they participate in articulating particular structures of power through performative embodiment.[2] Examining the texts in light of what is known about contemporary Roman theatre practice raises hitherto unregistered issues of how the performing body relates to the voice, and how the voice relates to its performance space. It is important to revisit Seneca's Rome not as a privileged point of origin but rather as a contingent and heavily contested moment in the history of the plays' production. There is a self-reflexive angle to this revisitation, which acknowledges its own position within the Senecan performance debate.

This chapter argues that heightened spoken discourse, whether poetic or oratorical, was perceived in antiquity as not only able to sway the mind or move the emotions but also able to penetrate and alter the condition of the auditor's physical self. This leads to the possibility of analysing recitation, the one medium for which we have definite evidence for Senecan tragedy in Roman performance,[3] in terms of its physical, affective capacity. A distinction should be made between the effect of spoken language on the body of the listener/s and its effect on the body of the performer/s. This becomes particularly important to the second half of the chapter, which considers the likelihood that Seneca's texts may be

[1] On which, see Henry & Henry (1985); Bishop (1985); Griffin (1976); Boyle (1997).
[2] Bourdieu (1991) and Butler (1997) discuss the body's implication in social discourses of authority and gender respectively. Fischer-Lichte (1989) shows how the actor's body is similarly 'culturally conditioned'.
[3] Quint. *Inst*. 8.3.31 and Tac. *Dial*. 2.1.

regarded fruitfully as *fabula saltica*, or libretti for the balletic art of tragic pantomime (*tragoedia saltata*). Separating the mute, ostentatiously displayed body of the celebrity dancer from the voice that articulates his passionate state creates a dynamic power relationship, and one which altogether suits the senecan trope of flesh mobilised by external forces. Right from their inception, Seneca's texts were embedded in an aesthetic tradition which regarded spoken discourse as a physical process, and theatre as an aural, palpably affective experience.

*Recitatio* as physical theatre

The one medium in which Seneca's work is unarguably attested as performed is *recitatio* (Quintilian 8.3.31).[4] "Recitation" of dramatic poetry - either by the poet himself (Tac. *Dial*. 2.1), or by a proxy such as a skilled freedman (Plin. *Ep*. 9.34), or in dialogue form with parts distributed among slave-actors (Plut. *Mor: Quaest. Conv*. 711) - could be held as a self-contained event in hired audience-chambers, which may or may not be attached to private houses, or as part of the entertainment provided by the host of a *convivium*.[5] *Recitatio* was no amateur affair: Tacitus' Maternus, who has just presented his controversial *Cato* and is contemplating an equally inflammatory *Thyestes*, is a trained orator, and Pliny worries that his poetry will suffer if subject to less than professional declamation.

There has been considerable difficulty in identifying precisely what constituted *Rezitationsdrame*, and whether this should be regarded as a coherent rubric or an artificial

[4] Quintilian mentions a discussion on tragic diction conducted by Seneca and Pomponius Secundus in their 'introductory remarks' (*praefationes*); "*praefatio*" does not appear to refer to a written preface, but rather to the apologia preceding a reading, as in Plin. *Ep*. 1.13.2: *sibi nuntiari iubent an iam recitator intraverit, an dixerit praefationem*. See comment by Sherwin-White (1966), 115.

[5] Plutarch 7.8. See Kelly (1979), 39 and Jones (1991) for discussions of dinner theatre, and Markus (2000) on the status of *recitatio* in the first century more generally. Pliny admits that the freedman he has chosen is a *novus lector*, but will nevertheless do a better job than him. See Plin. *Ep*. 7.17 for the typical content of *recitationes*.

conflation of concert recitals, dinner theatre and the oral circulation of poetry.[6] Mastronarde argues that the density of Senecan language and its vivid *enargeia* leaves little space for complementary action, and that the plays' dramatic effectiveness derives from immersion in the spoken word, not visual effects.[7] While persuasive, this position should not obscure the manifest distinction between drama experienced as literature and drama experienced as embodied speech. Recitation, as a communal activity involving live performers and aural engagement, has more in common with other forms of contemporary Roman theatre than with solitary perusal of a written document. As Tietze remarks, 'In so far as the circumstances of recitation furnished the elements essential for the creation of dramatic illusion - the physical presence of the reciter and a place to stand and move in - recitation is not essentially distinct from performance.'[8] Some scholars maintain that Senecan tragedy was unsuited to *recitatio* because some of its scenes require stage business to supplement the spoken word.[9] In its own way, this position is as misguided as that which would deny any performance potential whatsoever: it relies on the erroneous assumption that there was only one way to stage tragedy in imperial Rome. A more realistic position is taken by Kelly, who embraces the eclecticism of performance media and suggests that playwrights composed with a range of modes and venues in mind.[10] Moreover, the venerable tradition of performance poetry in antiquity should not be overlooked. Located at the fertile crossroads where epic, tragedy and oratory intersect, the Senecan aesthetic indeed lends itself to *recitatio*, provided

[6] Hollingsworth (2001); Jacobson (1981) argues strongly *contra* Zwierlein that no corresponding *Lesedramen* tradition existed in the Hellenistic world. Calder (1976), 4-5 interprets Seneca as privately staged "coterie" drama.
[7] Mastronarde (1970); followed by Goldberg (1996) and (2000). Herington (1966), on the other hand, did not see any incompatibility between 'his almost Leonardesque visual imagination' (436) and 'the superb *speakability* of Senecan verse.' (p423, emphasis original)
[8] Tietze (1988), 23.
[9] Hollingsworth (2001); Braun (1982); Eisgrub (2004).
[10] Kelly (1979), 43.

*recitatio* can be recuperated as a rich and autonomous art form rather than the degenerate cousin of "legitimate" theatre.[11]

The theatrical auditor, as Bruce R. Smith explains, converts a stream of more or less unbroken auditory data into meaningful elements, most of which resonate at a subconscious level.[12] In order to contextualize the experience of listening to dramatic poetry in Seneca's Rome, I will examine some passages in ancient sources concerned with the interface between sound and the body, before returning to the spatial environments acting as vessels for *recitatio*. The examples selected span periods and genres, but all retained currency in Seneca's Rome, and their juxtaposition provides a cumulative perspective on the physicalisation of discourse. Hearing, according to Plutarch, is the 'most emotionally moving' (παθητικωτάτην) of all the senses, and he warns (like Plato) against unregulated exposure (*Mor: de Rect. Aud.* 38a). This discussion deliberately skirts the Platonic territory of how language affects the mind or the soul,[13] and passes very briefly over the ability of words to conjure visual images.[14] Plutarch also describes the bodies of those listening to singing behaving like puppets on strings (ὥσπερ τισὶ μηρίνθοις, *Mor: Quaest. Conv.* 748c), and it is such corporeal perceptions of speech, the points at which auditory stimulus produces a somatic, kinetic, or kinaesthetic response, which concern us here. They are particularly evident when poetry is represented as having an incantatory, quasi-magical function, the ability *évoquer les morts, contraindre les vivants*.[15]

[11] Goldberg (1996) goes some way towards such a recuperation, but still defines "theatre" as "spectacle". Fantham (1982), 19 regards the convergence of tragedy, rhetoric and epic as representing 'the influence… of three *literary* forms' (emphasis added), without considering their inherently performative qualities. Markus (2000), 170 notes with reference to Suet. *Vita Verg.* 29 that gesture, expression and vocal delivery were integral to the reciter's skill.

[12] Smith (1999), 8-10

[13] e.g. Plato, *Grg.* 464b-465d; *Phdr.* 271c-d; *Menex.* 235a-c. Gellrich (1994), esp.275-78 examines Platonic *psychagogia*.

[14] On *enargeia* and the related concept of *phantasia* see Staley (2010), 55-60 with particular reference to [Longinus] *Subl.* 15.1 and Quint. *Inst.* 6.2. See also Webb (2009), 87-130.

[15] 'To summon the dead, to bind the living.' De Romilly (1973), 156 adds: '*L'effet mystérieux et saissisant de la parole poétique est, en effet, bien connu des premiers auteurs grecs*.'

A starting point with particular relevance to tragedy, however, is the notoriously slippery concept of *katharsis*. Leon Golden defines it as 'an act of *intellectual* insight elicited by verbal stimuli' (emphasis added), and sneers at the proposition that it might be anything more:

> No scholar… has been able to demonstrate that words, like psychoactive drugs, directly affect human biochemistry so as to stimulate or depress the central nervous system, although many discussions of *katharsis* appear to presuppose this fallacy.[16]

What Golden terms a 'fallacy' is actually a biological fact: 'words' are themselves products of chemical and electrical activity in various parts of the brain, which stimulate a complex network of neurotransmitters when they are received as signals from the aural or optic nerves.[17] Golden has also, of course, not considered the particular properties of tragic discourse as embodied speech. While it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which tragedy moves its audience kinaesthetically, tragedy's physical presence for the performer – however detached or disinterested – is undeniable.[18] Moreover, as Pedro Lain Entralgo argues, 'the [Aristotelian] mechanism of musical and tragic purgation… must be of psychophysiological character, and even purely physiological and somatic,'[19] locating emotion (passion) at the point where movements in the soul develop perceptible, palpable bodily analogues: shuddering, weeping, flushing. Lain Entralgo does not deny the more abstract moral aspect of *katharsis*, but insists that its therapeutic action is inseparable from the changes in physical condition wrought by heightened (poetic or oratorical) speech.

[16] Golden (1992), 26.
[17] The neurolinguistic studies in Damasio (1994) show how language use affects the central nervous system.
[18] Lada-Richards (1993).
[19] Lain Entralgo (1970), 190-91.

Although the bodily investment in Aristotelian *katharsis* might remain indeterminate, poetry has been recognized as having a potentially cathartic effect since Homer, eliciting explicitly physical reactions. Listening to Demodocus the bard singing, as requested, of the glorious sack of Troy, Odysseus 'melted (τήκετο), and from under his eyelids tears wet his cheeks. / As a woman wails, falling upon her beloved husband / who has fallen defending his city and his people' (*Od*. 8.521-24). The singer has not transmitted a pictorial narrative. Instead, his song has wrought psychosomatic change – dissolution, emasculation – through a sonic medium. The metapoetic aspect of Odyssean storytelling is well-established, suggesting that this kind of response may not be confined to the fictional scenario but implies an analogue among the poem's external auditors.[20] Bardic enchantment (θελκτήρια, *Od*. 1.337-44) may serve therapeutic ends, but Homeric *thelxis* is not always benign. The Sirens enchant men with a 'piercing' song (λιγυρῇ θέλγουσιν ἀοιδῇ, *Od*. 12.44) that transfixes the listener and reels him in, ultimately stripping him down to a rotting cadaver (*Od*. 12.45-46). Like Demodocus, the Sirens possess uncanny metapoetic qualities: their song promises insight into 'everything the Argives and Trojans went through, by the will of the gods, on the Trojan plain' (12.188-89), subject matter shared by a bard of the epic cycle.[21] Whether weeping or spellbound, his auditor is represented as participating physically in the poetic transaction.

The widespread investment of heightened language with the ability to cause somatic distress is evident in the practice of casting curses, and erotic or binding spells. Theocritus' *Idyll* 2 is narrated by an infatuated girl, Simaetha, casting the binding spell which will forcibly attract the object of her fantasies (καταδήσομαι, 2.3 & 2.10). Each ingredient cast into the flames is endowed with correspondence to her unfaithful lover's body: his flesh (σάρκ', 2.28) will burn like the laurel-leaves, barley and herbs will be scattered and crushed

[20] Goldhill (1991), 56-59; Murray (1983), passim, argues that "Homer" is an artificial identity constructed through the *Odyssey*'s internal representations of bards.
[21] Doherty (1995), 84 reads the Sirens as 'subverting the poet's authority.' For Pucci (1979), 428 the Sirens are 'the polemical embodiment of what for the poet of the *Odyssey* is wrong with the *Iliad*,' i.e. a morbid concentration on "heroic" deeds of the past.

like his bones (2.21, 2.62). Just as she melts (τάκω, 2.28) a piece of wax, so Delphis will melt with desire (ὣς τάκοιθ' ὑπ' ἔρωτος, 2.29), using the same verb (τήκειν, Dor. τάκειν) as Homer applies to Odysseus' breakdown at *Od.* 8.522. Although evidently a literary construct,[22] Simaetha's anatomization of her beloved resembles actual binding spells recovered on papyrus. *PGM* 1496-1595, for example, invokes a desire that will 'remain in [the victim's] heart and burn her guts, her breast, her liver, her breath, her bones, her marrow until she comes to me, loving me, and until she fulfills all my wishes.'[23] The vocatives and imperatives in binding spells and Simaetha's refrain (ἴυγξ, ἕλκε τὺ τῆνον ἐμὸν ποτὶ δῶμα τὸν ἄνδρα) suggest that the charms' perceived effectiveness depended in part on incantation, speech being attributed the power to *thelgein* even at a distance.

The *logos* of poets and sophists can likewise inflame and compel.[24] In his *Encomium of Helen,* Gorgias defines rhetoric as a substance that influences the mind as a drug influences the body:

> The power of language bears the same relation to the order of the mind as that of drugs to the order of the physical body. Just as some drugs expel certain humours from the body while others put a stop to illness or to life, some words cause pain and others pleasure, some instill fear and some courage in their audience while others, through their wicked persuasiveness, drug (ἐφαρμάκευσαν) and bewitch the mind. (Gorgias, *Helen* 14, trans. MacDowell).

In this *pharmakon* analogy, Gorgias introduces a psychosomatic element to the familiar ability of heightened language to stimulate passion.[25] The division between mind and body

[22] For discussion of literary aspects, see Goldhill (1991), Segal (1984). Dover (1971), 94 remarks that Simaetha's incantatory refrain is as bucolic as it is sorcerous; compare also Virgil's *Eclogue* 8.
[23] Betz (1986), 67. (Trans. O'Neil.)
[24] Cf. Pl. *Grg.* 452e, *Menex.* 235a-c, *Prt.* 315a.

collapses altogether in the verb ἐφαρμάκευσαν: some speeches exhibit psychotropic effects that "drug" the listener into compliance. As MacDowell points out, 'No sharp distinction is made between getting someone to believe something and getting him [*sic*] to do something'; persuasion is followed inevitably by obedience.[26] Gorgias' point is that Helen, if assailed by sufficiently persuasive language, would have been unable to resist capitulation, violated 'as if seized by force' (βίαι ἁρπασθεῖσα, 6).[27] Like the victim of a curse or the subject of torture, her body is converted into a material index of the willpower channelled through her captor's voice. Poetry engages the emotions, rhetoric 'moulds' (ἐτυπώσατο, 13) or imprints itself upon the receptive mind, and incantations 'enchant and persuade and alter it by magic' (ἔθελξε καὶ ἔπεισε καὶ μετέστησεν αὐτὴν γοητείαι, 10). Gorgias also uses *thelgein* to describe the action of heightened language on the auditor. As Jacqueline de Romilly shows, what the sophist has accomplished is the transformation of persuasive discourse from a numinous gift into a teachable (and marketable) skill, creating *une science de la magie du verbe*.[28]

Although Gorgias, like his contemporaries, concentrates more on how the mind or soul (*psuchē*) is affected by language, this is not necessarily as abstract as it may appear. *Psuchē*, regarded by the pre-Socratics as separate from *sōma*, could nevertheless be regarded as possessing atomic structure and existing within the spectrum of matter.[29] Moreover,

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[25] 'Fearful terror and tearful pity and melancholy longings' also appear as the kind of *pathēmata* suffered by those who empathise with the misfortunes recounted in poetry (Gorg. *Hel*. 9).

[26] MacDowell (1982), 15. Compare Butler on the legal questions surrounding the concept of incitement: 'How is it in such cases that we imagine that speech has insinuated itself into action: how do we imagine that speech is heard, taken up as motivation, mechanically or contagiously inducing the listener to act?' (1997), 21. Butler (1997), 379 also refers to this as an 'ascription of… magical efficacy.'

[27] See Buxton (1982) on the opposition of *peitho* (persuasion) to both *bia* (force) and *dolos* (deceit). Gellrich 1994), 280 comments that Gorgias' 'images of piercing and penetration… align such intangible modes of force as the *logos* with physical assault. To be seduced by speech is to undergo the psychic equivalent of rape.'

[28] De Romilly (1973), 162. See also comment by Thomas & Webb (1994).

[29] For discussion and references, see Kirk & Raven (1957), 158-59 on Anaximenes and 422 on Democritus, for whom 'the soul consists of spherical atoms spread through the body;' also Freeman (1946), 314 on the Democritan relationship of breath to 'soul-particles,' whether these are to be understood as composed of fire or air. Pre-Socratic concepts of vision and perception are also worth considering in this context. Stoic physics inherited this formula: as Graver (2007), 18 shows, 'It is axiomatic for Stoicism… that the mind is necessarily a material thing, and that mental states are also physical facts or changes in the world. […] The Stoic *psuche*… is as much subject to the laws of physics, and as accessible to scientific investigation, as everything else in the

Gorgias asserts that *logos* exercises its superhuman, borderline supernatural power through 'microscopic, invisible particles,' implying that some form of physical interaction occurs as language saturates the mind and starts to become manifest in corporeal activity: tears, arousal, pain alleviated, or slavish obedience.[30] The reaction may even be chemical; ἐφαρμάκευσαν. Gorgias' *Encomium*, a self-confessed *paignion*, may not be altogether serious, but it nevertheless translates into concrete terms of drugging and rape the same anxieties over runaway sophistry that recur throughout Plato and the tragedians.

For the author of the first-century treatise *On the Sublime*,[31] certain types of discourse are able to overcome the barriers of common sense and skepticism and stun (ἐκπλῆξαι) or flood (καταντλῆσαι) their listeners in such a way that language does not merely persuade, but positively enslaves them (δουλοῦται) (12.4-5, 15.9). "Longinus" compares its effect to a lightning bolt, arguing (contrary to Gorgias) that while persuasion is subject to the listener's conscious control, the *ekplexis* induced by this kind of speech induces such ecstasy (εἰς ἔκστασιν ἄγει) that it exercises 'irresistible power and force' (δυναστείαν καὶ βίαν ἄμαχον, 1.4). *Hypsos* can occur in poetry or oratory, and comprises figures of speech such as metaphor, hyperbole, phantasia (visualization), asyndeton, anaphora and periphrasis;[32] but its main ingredient is *pathos*, emotion (29.2). In a particularly revealing passage, "Longinus" compares the effect of heightened discourse to that of music:

> οὐ γὰρ αὐλὸς μὲν ἐντίθησί τινα πάθη τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις καὶ οἷον ἔκφρονας καὶ κορυβαντιασμοῦ πλήρεις ἀποτελεῖ, καὶ βάσιν ἐνδούς τινα ῥυθμοῦ πρὸς ταύτην ἀναγκάζει βαίνειν ἐν ῥυθμῷ καὶ συνεξομοιοῦσθαι τῷ μέλει τὸν ἀκροατήν … καὶ νὴ

universe.' Gill (2006), 16 introduces the term 'psychophysical holism' to describe the sōma/psychē relationship as conceived by both Stoic and Epicurean physicists.

[30] Lain Entralgo (1970), 99 comments that 'Verbal persuasion, the medicament of the persuasive word, not only dominates the will but can also modify the entire *physis*, body and soul.'

[31] Russell (1995), 147 would 'strongly suggest a date in the first century A.D.', in which case the author cannot be the Longinus named in the 10th- century manuscript. Fantham (2000), 20 also argues for a Neronian date.

[32] [Longinus] *Subl.* 5.1, 8.1, 11-12, 15.1-2, 20.2, 32.7.

> Δία φθόγγοι κιθάρας, οὐδὲν ἁπλῶς σημαίνοντες, ταῖς τῶν ἤχων μεταβολαῖς καὶ τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλους κράσει καὶ μίξει τῆς συμφωνίας θαυμαστὸν ἐπάγουσι πολλάκις, ὡς ἐπίστασαι, θέλγητρον … οὐκ οἰόμεθα δ' ἄρα τὴν σύνθεσιν, ἁρμονίαν τινὰ οὖσαν λόγων … κηλεῖν … παντοίως ἡμῶν τῆς διανοίας ἐπικρατοῦσαν; (*Subl*. 39.2-3)
>
> ['For doesn't the flute stir emotion in those listening, carrying them away as if they were filled with Corybantic madness? Giving the stimulus of rhythm, it forces the listener to move in time to it and assimilates him to its tune… and by Zeus, the voice of the cithara, altogether meaningless, often leads to an amazing enchantment through the shifting of its sounds and how they mingle, blending harmoniously with each other… So surely, wouldn't you expect verbal composition, being a harmony of words… to enchant [us]… altogether taking control of our minds?]'[33]

Once again, *thelxis* appears in the context of heightened discourse and its impact on the auditor. By implication, it is not just the mind which is affected by the mellifluous sound; if speech is 'verbal music', employing the same devices of rhythm and melody available to the instrumentalist and augmented by semantic meaning, and if music compels the listener to respond physically to its beat and tone, then it follows that not only the cognitive but the corporeal self falls under the spell of the spoken word.

Tragic text spoken aloud bombards the bodies of its auditors with powerful stimuli. Elaine Fantham gives numerous examples of sound superseding sense in Seneca's oeuvre, but attributes this to bookishness.[34] On the contrary, Seneca composed in a tragic tradition which anticipated wordplay and sensuous description. The tragic discourse that developed

[33] For comment see De Romilly (1975), 77-78. In *Laws* 664B & 665C, Plato ascribes to music the ability to *epaidein* (enchant) impressionable youngsters and declares it the duty of citizens to *epaidein* themselves constantly under the spell of the Good. (On Plato's problematic application of magical language to philosophical practice, see Gellrich 1994.)
[34] Fantham (1982), 33.

during the Roman Republic foregrounds the sonic qualities of dramatic utterance. This is manifest in three major ways: the vividness of the diction, especially when applied to bodily sensation; the stylistic relish taken in alliteration and pleonasm;[35] and the unusual practice, occurring repeatedly even in our limited extant corpus, of speaking aloud about silence. Ennius' *Thyestes* contains a particularly lurid example of sensation-rich language: *ipse summis saxis fixus asperis evisceratus, / latere pendens, saxa spargens tabo sanie et sanguine atro* (Fr. 150 [296-97]).[36] The rocks are sharpened to vicious points (*summis… asperis*) and the body they have disembowelled and impaled now spatters them with three almost synonymous fluids: gore (*tabo*), bloodclots (*sanie*), and dark blood (*sanguine atro*). This overload gluts the senses on high-density language. Alliteration is the most pervasive rhetorical device, as in Ennius' *Medea Exul*, which opens with the heroine *animo aegro amore saevo saucia* (Fr. 103 [216]), or Accius' *Tereus*, in which someone – possibly Procne – wonders *quo pacto magnam molem minuam miserae* (Fr. 646). More than mere embellishment, this phonemic repetition represents a genuine aesthetic trope, a musical element equal in weight to metrical rhythm. Onomatopoeia is also exploited throughout, as in Accius' sonic ecphrasis of a seashore:

> hac ubi curvo litore latratu
> unda sub undis labunda sonit […]
> simul et circum stagna tonantibus
> excita saxis saeva sonando
> crepitu clangante cachinnant. (Fr. 573-77).

[35] Boyle (2006) draws attention to multiple examples.
[36] References to Ennius use Jocelyn (1967); references to all other Republican playwrights use Warmington (1936).

Finally, there are the occasions on which mimetic silence is sacrificed to diegetic description. A character in an unknown work by Pacuvius regrets that *lacrimis lingua debiliter stupet* (Fr. 228), and Naevius' Danae similarly reports how rape left her unable to speak (*excidit orationis omnis confidentia*, Fr. 5).[37] Accius' Philoctetes even relates his own loss of consciousness: *iam iam absumor: conficit animam / vis volneris ulceris aestus* (Fr. 566-67). Note also the alliteration and the strong sensory detail of Philoctetes' burning ulcer. Here, the drama is most unequivocally in the word, to use Eliot's phrase,[38] conveyed by techniques which have formerly been labelled bombast but in fact represent a dramatic form where sonic texture is of paramount importance.[39]

Mimetic realism was not the aesthetic goal of Republican tragedy. It was overridden by the linguistic exuberance that immersed its auditors. Early modern playhouses have been called 'instruments for producing, shaping and propagating sound',[40] and the same could be said of the first permanent Roman theatres. Vitruvius, explaining their architectural form, comments that 'the voice is a flowing breath of air (*spiritus fluens aeris*), and perceived by the hearing in its touch (*tactu*). It is moved in infinite circular waves, just as when a stone is thrown into still water and countless expanding circles of waves ripple out from the epicentre' (*de Arch*. 5.3.6).[41] Vitruvian theatres are dominated by the voice. Horace might grumble that Augustan theatrical *voluptas* 'has migrated from the ear (*ab aure*) to the unstable eyes and their empty gratification' (*Epist*. 2.1.187-88), but for the architect, Roman drama was still an aural medium. The unobstructed passage of sound from stage to auditorium is his most important consideration (*de Arch*. 5.3.4), requiring a whole section on

[37] Boyle (2006), 41 comments in regard to this passage that 'emotionally disturbing events are given mannered form,' and points out that silence becomes a common corollary to sexual assault in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
[38] Eliot (1951) [1927a], 67 famously asserted that 'in the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it'; the phrase was picked up in the title of Mastronarde (1970).
[39] Beacham (1992), 124 refers to Accius' 'bombast, hyperbole and "unearned" emotion'; on Ennius, see Brooks (1981), 182-85. Brooks (1981), 3 comments that the modern critical reception of Ennius has followed Horace in believing that '*fortis* he is, but *rudis* too and *ferox*.' Fantham (2003), 99 refers to Pacuvius as 'melodramatic'.
[40] Smith (1999), 206.
[41] Vitruvius trans. Rowland (1999).

musical intervals (5.4) and another whole section on *echea* (5.5), the bronze vessels placed around a theatre to properly redistribute vocal and instrumental harmonics. Designers who site their theatre in 'consonant' locations (*quos appellant [Graeci] "synechountas"*), in which 'the voice, reinforced from below, rises… and reaches the ear with precise clarity,' will 'bring flawless theatres to completion' (5.8.2). Sightlines, by contrast, are not mentioned at all. The natural synaesthesia of hearing and touch was intensified by the quasi-musical marshalling of sound into poetry.

Another major model which should not be overlooked when considering Seneca as performance text is *declamatio*. Popular among Rome's professional elite, and considered a respectable, masculine alternative to appearing onstage,[42] *declamatio* showcased the oratorical skill of participants in a mock-debate (*controversia*) or persuasive speech (*suasoria*). The sensational situations set up to contain the speech, such as abduction, adultery, poisoning, or dilemmas faced by illustrious figures from history or myth - often resembled those in tragedy or mime. The influence of *declamatio* on Senecan rhetoric, not only on exchanges such as Hippolytus and the Nurse (*Phaed*. 435-573) but also on ecphrastic passages such as the Underworld in *Hercules Furens* (662-827) and deliberations such as Medea's (893-971), has been widely noted.[43] Oratory contains indubitably performative elements.[44] *Actio* (delivery) was crucially important (Quint. *Inst*. 11.3.6). A forensic speaker employed *pathos* to move his audience and influence their judgment.[45] Senecan rhetoric appears to anticipate a similar mode of oratorical delivery, achieving its effects through implanting suggestions, not providing literal enactment.

[42] See Gunderson (2000), 111-48 on the fraught relationship of orators to actors in rhetorical theory and training.
[43] Pratt (1983), 145 & 154; Tarrant (1985), 20-21; Boyle (2011), xliv-xlviii.
[44] Gunderson (2000).
[45] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.18 – 2.11.7 examines the factors which incite anger, fear, shame, *charis*, pity, resentment, envy, admiration. See Staley (2010) for comment.

Herington concludes that, 'Senecan dramatic verse is designed, no less than the verse of Marlowe or Racine, for the effect on the ear, not on the eye; and that effect is shattering.'[46] According to Ubersfeld, the act of performing creates a 'bubble' of deviant space, separate from that in which the spectators reside, within which gestures, words and objects assume intensified symbolic significance.[47] This bubble can expand or contract, but never be entirely eliminated without by definition terminating the performance. It can be determined by the three walls of a box-set, as in a proscenium theatre, or incorporate an entire city,[48] or it can shrink to enclose only the performing body, as in environmental theatre where the actors move among the spectators, or indeed in *recitationes* where the absence of designated scenery forces all definition to rebound on the speaker himself. The tighter the bubble, the more concentrated the energy it contains.

Consider, for instance, a *recitatio* of *Thyestes* 802-74 (the zodiac ode) or *Medea* 705-30 (the catalogue of poisons) in terms of the spatial taxonomy underpinning theatrical experience.[49] An enormous geographical span could be represented verbally in the confines of a dining room or a recital platform. The battery of proper nouns, such as place-names or constellations, anchors the action in a familiar world. Even as they collide and fall, stars retain their astrological personifications; plants coil into Medea's hands from specific locations: *gemmifer Hydaspes, invius Eryx,* the Hercynian forest and Parthian plains.[50] It has been widely recognized that Seneca's human protagonists act in correspondence with the distorted world around them.[51] Dramaturgically, this draws supposedly offstage (diegetic)

[46] Herington (1966), 444.
[47] Ubersfeld (1999), 24 writes that 'everything that happens onstage… is marked with unreality. […] An actor could sit on a spectator's knee, and the two would be no less apart than if separated by an invisible ramp or blown apart by a 100 000-volt current.' see also Carlson (1989), 128 and States (1985) for similar comments.
[48] See Griffin (1976) on Jesuit pageants that incorporated whole urban communities.
[49] Issacharov (1981), 215-22 divides dramatic space into 'mimetic' (visible onstage) and 'diegetic' (mediated by discourse). See p30 above.
[50] As Herington (1966), 437 comments, 'Seneca's vision carried him far beyond a single landscape… He carried in his mind's eye, almost continually, an astronaut's view of the entire Roman world, and of the shadowy regions on its borders.'
[51] Herington (1966), Pratt (1963), Fyfe (1983), Poe (1969), Littlewood (2004).

material directly into the *recitatio* and its immediate surroundings. The speaker is not "playing" Thyestes any more - or any less - than he is "playing" the zodiac or the *locus horridus*. *Recitatio* reduces to almost nothing the "mimetic" space that in more realistic dramatic modes surrounds the speaker. It enables *Thyestes* 830-74 to set off a chain reaction culminating in universal annihilation (*everso / cardine mundus*, 876-77; *mundo pereunte*, 884) and to compress this unthinkable magnitude into the breath, the *spiritus*, or in other (Stoic) words, the *pneuma*: the solitary soul of a man.

In a study of the relationship between Senecan tragedy and fourth-style frescoes, Eric Varner shows how theatricality pervaded the domestic space where such performances are attested. Interior walls were painted with mythological scenes set in illusionistic architecture, often decorated with theatre masks or observed by painted figures to emphasise the dynamics of spectatorship, or - quite frequently - depicted a *scaenae frons* occupied by performers.[52] Varner remains uncommitted on the staging question, but points out that even if their performance was restricted to the *convivium*, it still took place 'in private domestic spaces or imperial residences whose visual backdrops consisted of decoration which often vividly depicted grotesque and tragic myths.'[53] These performance spaces erased the already indistinct line between fantasy and everyday perception. Theatricality was a way of life during the early principate, where role-play, masking, mirroring and dissimulation were not leisure pursuits so much as survival tactics. Theatre as an art form blended into theatre as a lifestyle.[54] During *recitatio*, then, the spoken word could clearly colour its surroundings: a trained voice describes Thyestes forcing the bloody goblet to his lips as a fellow-diner raises his wine-cup and Orestes *Matricida* hesitates behind him in a *trompe-d'oeil* archway. Your ears are still ringing with the warning that all those who exercise power (*vos*) are threatened

[52] Varner (2000). See also Boyle (1997), 18-20 on Seneca's 'iconosphere'.
[53] Varner (2000), 132.
[54] See in particular Bartsch (1994), Beacham (1999), Henry & Henry (1985), Erasmo (2004), 117-29.

in turn (607-14). Scenic space appears to have collapsed; the bubble has burst, assimilating the *convivium* itself to Thyestes' banquet.

Roman Performance Reconsidered

In addition to *recitatio*, the various other theatrical media on offer in Seneca's Rome have likewise left their imprints on the architecture of the plays. Traces can be discerned at all levels, informing everything from overarching principles such as the episodic structure down to fine details such as the repetition of terms pertaining to sight.[55] Even if Seneca's own works were not immediately staged, they provide a unique record of what constituted drama at the time. Although various studies have dealt with Senecan theatricality as an abstract property of the works,[56] and other studies have dealt with the material conditions of first-century Roman theatre,[57] few scholars have hitherto integrated the texts with the available contextual data.[58] This section provides a brief overview of the staging question, followed by a longer discussion of one of the most innovative and plausible recent suggestions regarding the performance of Seneca in antiquity, which links the Senecan corpus to the performance medium of *tragoedia saltata*, otherwise known as tragic pantomime.

Beginning with the remarks of A.W. Schlegel in his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1808; translated into French in 1814 and English in 1815), the critical reception of Seneca during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dismissed the texts as 'closet drama' on the basis that they violated both taste and decorum. Schlegel was followed in this respect by philological heavyweights Leo, Boissier, Nisard, Mendell, Duff and Beare in consolidating the impression of the Senecan corpus as rhetorical, pompous and frigid. T.S.

[55] e.g. *Thy*. 901-07 (Atreus' tableau of his brother), *Ag*. 720-75 (Cassandra's vision).
[56] Braun (1982); Sutton (1986); Schiesaro (2003); Littlewood (2004); Eisgrub (2004); Davis (1993). Erasmo (2004), 137 attempts to argue that 'Senecan tragedy is theatrical even without the theatre.'
[57] Wiles (2003); Csapo & Slater (1994); Sear (2005); Beacham (1999); Bieber (1971).
[58] Kelly (1979); Calder (1976); Zanobi (2008a & b). Boyle (1997) discusses ancient staging in his introductory remarks before moving on to a treatment of the plays' thematic qualities.

Eliot supported the view in his widely circulated introduction to the 1927 edition of the *Tenne Tragedies*, 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation', which argued that the plays 'were intended for recitation because they are perfectly adapted for recitation – they are better recited than read,'[59] and supplied one of the century's most-quoted sound-bites pertaining to the Roman dramatist: 'In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it. His characters all seem to speak with the same voice, and at the top of it; they recite in turn.'[60] Eliot shared the view of contemporary scholars of Elizabethan literature, that Seneca's crude but readily imitable style had provided a crutch for Renaissance playwrights en route to creating a more mature and supple form of dramatic verse.[61]

Some isolated dissenting voices – Léon Herrmann, for example, whose 1924 *Le Théâtre de Sénèque* argued for full-scale spectacular production, and Moses Hadas, whose recuperative 1939 essay hears agony behind the tirades – did little to alter the consensus.[62] In 1966, the anti-performance camp received a significant boost from Otto Zwierlein's *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas*, which marked the turning point in the debate from issues of artistic merit to issues of technical practicality and set the tone of the debate for the next twenty years. Scholars began to focus on the minutiae of staging: the entrances and exits of characters, their identification, establishment of setting, the presence of the chorus, number of actors needed, placement of key props and plausibility of dramatic devices such as asides. The principle that all stage action must be accompanied by textual indication became the

[59] Eliot (1951) [1927a], 76.
[60] Eliot (1951) [1927a], 67.
[61] Eliot (1951) [1927a], 88 calls Seneca 'coarse.' The view is shared by Lucas (1922), 17 and Cunliffe (1925), 15-18. Cunliffe (1912), 7-8 writes that 'one does not see how the ten tragedies which pass under his name could have been acted, for they are singularly ill-suited to stage representation… In spite of these defects, and in part, indeed, because of them, better suited to the modern world… Its strongly marked characteristics made it easier to imitate.'
[62] In this, Hadas (1939) follows Regenbogen (1928); Harrison (2009), 149-50 notes that the wartime experiences of Herrmann and Regenbogen, both of whom served in WWI, may have contributed to their unusually sympathetic readings of Seneca. See further Ch. 8.

foundation for studies on both sides of the debate.[63] In 1982, Elaine Fantham went so far as to deny the possibility even of recitation, contending that due to ambiguities in determining the identity of speakers, 'There is, it seems, only one medium in which the action of Senecan tragedy comes through with complete clarity, and that is the written text.'[64] Evidently, nothing could be proven by close reading, and Seneca entered the 1990s at something of an impasse.

On the other hand, C.J. Herington's essay on 'Senecan Tragedy' – published, like Zwierlein's *Rezitationsdramen*, in 1966 – provided an alternative model for how to understand Seneca's works in their capacity as performance texts. For Herington, the unreality of Senecan discourse articulates the wider cosmic significance of human activity by converting abstract concepts into powerful sense impressions.[65] In 1979, H.A. Kelly made the liberating suggestion that Seneca does not anticipate a single all-encompassing ur-performance occasion, as is assumed for Greek tragedy, but rather a range of coexisting media wherein the texts could find performative expression. Over the last thirty years, it is this position which has steadily gained ground.[66] Fitch, for example, now uses in the introduction to his 2002 Loeb edition two exemplary scenes, both denounced by Fantham as unstageable, to show the exact opposite: 'There is little doubt that Seneca is envisaging stage performance as he composes.'[67] I would concur with Fitch (as well as with Herington, Braun, Davies, Sutton, Dupont, Boyle and most recently Kragelund) that the circumstantial evidence both internal and external points towards performance; the whole debate, as Kragelund somewhat impatiently points out, rests on rather obsolete and prescriptive assumptions about

[63] Taplin (1978) established this as the orthodox approach to ancient stagecraft.
[64] Fantham (1982), 48.
[65] Herington (1966), esp. 447-51, 456-60.
[66] Boyle (2006), 192; Hall (2002), 27; Kragelund (2008); Keulen (2001), 27; Fitch (2002), 21.
[67] Fitch (2002), 20-21; compare Fantham (1982), 36 & 41. The two examples are Medea's murder of her children (*Med*. 970-1019) and Phaedra importuning Hippolytus (*Phaed*. 583-718)

the definition of theatre.[68] With a few notable exceptions,[69] both supporters and opponents of performance regard "tragedy" as requiring a fully-staged, full-cast linear exposition of the text.[70] As I hope to show, however, Claudian and Neronian Rome conceptualised theatre quite differently. The question now, therefore, is not so much *whether* Seneca's plays were written for production as *what kind* of production provided their compositional milieu. In narrowly historicist terms, this has little currency; we have no direct documentary evidence either way. It is clear, however, that some form of staging of some form of tragedy went on in early imperial Rome, and the best possible starting point for determining its characteristics would appear to be this double handful of (almost-)complete surviving scripts.

It seems disingenuous to evade the problem by assuming that there is no essential difference between "theatre of the mind" - a play on the page taking shape in the reader's imagination - and a play that unfolds in real-time live action. A useful point of comparison may be Martin Esslin's discussion of radio drama. Esslin emphasises important differences between language received as sound and language received as written text. The analogy of Seneca with radio drama, first made by T.S. Eliot in 1927, should nevertheless not be pushed too far.[71] Esslin writes that the 'special advantage' of audio drama is 'as an immaterial medium not definitely located in space, able to move between dream and reality, the inner world of the mind and the outer world of concrete objects'.[72] This does not quite fit the phenomenology of live performance, which relies rather on a triadic tension between the materials which are present, the referents they represent, and the imaginary world they invoke. Despite its vocal dimension, the disembodiment of radio makes it more akin to literature in this respect, as it isolates the listener in communion with the text rather than

[68] Kragelund (2008), 184-85. Walker likewise recognised this in 1969, as did Herrmann in 1928.
[69] Beacham (1999), Tarrant (1978), Zanobi (2008a & b), Kelly (1979)
[70] Among supporters: Braun (1982), Sutton (1986), Davis (1993), Rosenmeyer (1993), Dupont (1995), Boyle (1997) & (2011), Marshall (2000), Schiesaro (2003). Among opponents: Zwierlein (1966), Fantham (2000), Mayer (2003), Goldberg (1996).
[71] Esslin (1962). For an example of taking the analogy too far, see Russell (1977).
[72] Esslin (1962), 184.

forging a perpetual conflict between the fictional world and the fabric, including bodies, used in its construction.

Two recent studies have independently drawn pertinent conclusions about Senecan metatheatre. Both Schiesaro (2003) and Littlewood (2004) demonstrate how central characters assume control of the action, thereby becoming analogues for the poet as they construct and execute tragic plots. Primary examples are Medea, Atreus in the *Thyestes* and Juno in *Hercules Furens*.[73] Atreus, 'the playwright with bloody hands,' in Schiesaro's words, 'stands out in the play as the incarnation of a victory… which is inevitably connected with the force and pleasure of poetry.'[74] In addition, and more problematically, these figures are allied with an equally avid and culpable audience who take pleasure in viewing the simulated pain on display.[75] Neither of these studies in metatheatre, however, despite their erudition in other respects, takes into account a spatio-physical context for performance. As a result, their analyses take place in a vacuum, sealed in the eternal present of literary commentary, and must remain purely conjectural until they can be shown to have applied in practice. Because of this equivocation about performance conditions, both Littlewood and Schiesaro vacillate uneasily between ascribing responses to the 'audience' and the 'reader' of Senecan tragedy. Littlewood refers to 'drama (whether actual or virtual)' as if there were no perceptible difference, and recognises no distinction between 'the actual audience sitting in the theatre or reading the play.' He claims to 'approach Senecan tragedy more as text than as theatre,' but then proceeds to declare that 'what we see on the stage are passions in physical form.'[76] Schiesaro's conflation of reader and spectator is equally untenable:

[73] Schiesaro (2003), 16. Littlewood (2004), 181ff also puts Cassandra and messengers in the same category. Boyle (1997) shows how early modern drama developed Senecan metatheatre.
[74] Schiesaro (2003), 48.
[75] On the pleasure taken in witnessing simulated suffering, see Arist. *Poet.* 4.9-12 and, for a more contemporary response, Plut. *Quaest. Conv*. 5.1.
[76] Littlewood (2003), 11, 12; 260, 62.

> The tortuous relationships between different levels of dramatic action in Thyestes heighten the audience's perception of the play as an artificial literary product… The audience… faces a work in progress… Metadrama carves up a schism between the readers' involvement in the artistic creation and their awareness of its fictional status.[77]

This would be less disruptive in a study with a different focus, such as imagery, or philosophical affiliation, but when the subject is (meta)theatricality, it seems perverse to exclude the theatre from discussion. This is not to invalidate the conclusions of either Littlewood or Schiesaro. Indeed, I believe that their findings ought to be taken further, and may be adduced as evidence for Seneca's dramaturgical incorporation of Roman performance culture.

In an influential 1978 essay, R.J. Tarrant demonstrated that many apparently aberrant Senecan conventions in fact occur frequently in extant post-Classical (Hellenistic or Republican) comedy, and were probably derived by Seneca from lost Augustan tragedies employing the same devices.[78] These include asides, descriptions of action and introspective monologues, and characters - in comedy, generally the *servi callidi* - who plot and enact manipulative schemes to ensure that the play's resolution conforms to the design of the dramatist and the desires of the audience.[79] When applied to Seneca's violent revenge-plots, as Schiesaro demonstrates, such identification has devastating effects on a captive, captivated audience.[80]

[77] Schiesaro (2003), 61. Emphasis added.
[78] Tarrant later claimed that he was attempting to make these connections 'without arguing that Seneca wrote for the theatre' (1985), 14 n.75.
[79] Tarrant (1978), 249-50. See also Dupont (2007), 189-241, Slater (1985) and Wright (1975) on comic metatheatre, e.g. Pseudolus' declaration (Plaut. *Pseud*. 401) that *nunc ego poeta fiam*.
[80] Schiesaro (2003).

These effects, however, depend on spectators who find themselves watching with Atreus, not readers who imagine Atreus watching. The peculiar, tainted compound of exultation and revulsion produced by occupying the revenger's role can be adequately imagined but not directly experienced unless the violated body of a Thyestes (or Hippolytus, or an Oedipus) is made present. Littlewood acknowledges this in commenting that 'Atreus' power over his actor-audience watches his scripted revenge fulfilled in the passive flesh of his victim … The revenger draws satisfaction from the impotence of audience *or actor* when compared with the authority of the dramatist.'[81] Actors, in particular the actor representing Thyestes, appear in this scenario as *materia* to be displayed and pummeled and danced like marionettes and flown aloft and degraded: a state reminiscent of the working conditions which condemned Roman actors, along with prostitutes and gladiators, to *infamia* (complete absence of legal rights).[82] The actor's body was by definition a servile body, the objectified carcass of a non-person. Whether Thyestes was played by a slave, whose status lent a frisson of literal vulnerability to his abuse,[83] or an aristocrat enslaved to the shameful passion for lending his body to public spectacle,[84] the conjunction of the performing body with that of the tortured king cannot be removed from considerations of Thyestean metatheatre.

Seneca as pantomime libretto

Pantomime (*tragoedia saltata*), regarded in antiquity as the successor to Classical tragedy and a development in the art of staging tragic texts,[85] was a dominant theatrical form in first-century Rome, becoming increasingly pre-eminent in late antiquity. A solo dancer, backed by

[81] Littlewood (2004), 183. Emphasis added.
[82] Edwards (1997).
[83] Moore (1998), 10-11 discusses the epilogue to Plautus' *Cistellaria* and the real possibility that actors might be beaten after the performance. See also Parker (1989) on the psychological value of comic punishment more generally, and Leigh (2004), 86-94 on enslavement as a social phenomenon negotiated through comedy.
[84] Edwards (1993); see also Beacham (1999), Bartsch (1994). The principal ancient source for theatricality as a way of life in the early Empire is Tacitus, *Annals* esp. books 14-16.
[85] Csapo & Slater (1994), 382; Hall (2008), 8; Lada-Richards (2007).

vocal accompaniment, moved through a series of roles drawn from tragic myth. The *Latin Anthology* contains an anonymous description of the pantomime dancer:

ingressus scaenam populum saltator adorat.
    sollerti tendit prodere gesta manu.
nam cum grata **chorus** diffundit cantica dulcis
    quae resonat **cantor**, motibus ipse probat.
pugnat, ludit, amat, bacchatur, vertitur, adstat (*Anth. Lat*. 100.3-7).[86]

Ruth Webb identifies this alternation of fluid movement and sudden freeze as the essential rhythm of pantomime.[87] According to Lucian's (admittedly exaggerated) account, audiences could tell from precise variations in gesture which characters were being represented (*Salt*. 80). Nevertheless, as Webb has shown, 'The performance of actions in pantomime… can never have been "literal", but must have been circumscribed by the artistic constraints of the genre.'[88] It used a sophisticated, stylized movement vocabulary, not mimetic in the sense of representational but rather affective, acting upon the bodies of the spectators through corporeal and neurological sympathy.[89]

The *Anthologia* poet quoted above mentions a *chorus* and a *cantor* in the same breath, and other sources are divided as to whether one or more singers accompanied the pantomime dancer.[90] The likeliest solution suggests a group of singers out of which a solo vocalist could

[86] ['Entering the stage, the dancer addresses his public, / extending an expert hand to produce his gestures. / For when the chorus pour out their pleasant song / he affirms with movement whatever echoes in the singer's voice: / he fights, he plays, he loves, he raves, he pirouettes, he stops.']
[87] Webb (2008) 60-85.
[88] Webb (2008), 75.
[89] 'Neuropsychological experiments demonstrate that when individuals observe an action done by another individual their motor cortex becomes active, in the absence of any overt motor activity.' Rizzolati & Craighero (2004), 174. On the neurology of watching dance, see Calvo-Merino et al. (2005).
[90] For soloists, see *Anth. Pal*. 16.287 and 9.542. Lucian *Salt.* 63 mentions choral backing, but later contrasts the ὑποκριτοῦ εὐφωνίαν [fine voice of the actor] and the ᾠδόντων ὁμοφωνίαν [harmony of the singers] (68). Kelly

periodically emerge to speak or sing. Lucian refers to the *hypokrites* (68), who has been variously identified as an assistant dancer, an interlocutor or an actor playing minor roles; it may equally be a term for a vocal soloist.[91] The musical line, whether choral or solo, passed like electric current through dancer and audience alike, galvanizing the one into well-trained, finely tuned motion, and compelling the other to sway, albeit inarticulately, in response. The power dynamics articulated by pantomime may thus be construed as a three-way nexus of body, voice and gaze, in which the dancer's body hangs upon the sound, absorbing the lyric line and flinging it back out into the *cavea* redoubled as kinetic energy. The audience / spectators receive two complementary but only laterally related sets of stimuli, fixing their eyes on the mobilized body while simultaneously being penetrated by the mobilizing soundtrack.[92] Pantomime, like Senecan tragedy, concentrates on climactic incident, arresting time in moments of horror, madness or emotional stress until they swell into long stretches of sensation (as opposed to action, or suspense).[93] Webb calls pantomime a 'synaesthetic experience' which fuses the rhythmic pulse of percussion and the frenzied lyrics with the dancer's limber contortions and sudden freezes, producing 'an all-absorbing experience for spectator and performer, bordering on trance.'[94] Writing in the fourth century, the orator Libanius praises the ability of vigorous dancing to energize an audience: 'What old man, or layabout (ῥᾴθυμος), the one improving on his nature (φύσεως) and the other on his age, would not be stimulated to movement (ἐις τὸ κινεῖσθαι ... παρακαλοῦμενος) by [the dancer's] leaping (πηδημάτων)?' (64.117). In other words, not merely the content of the pantomime but

(1979) also supports some combination. Webb (2008), 62 provides further late antique evidence for this, both textual and iconographic.

[91] For discussion of the *hypokrites*' role, see Lada-Richards (2007), 42 and Jory (1998), *passim*.

[92] On what Lada-Richards (2007), 73-74 calls the 'cultural logic' of vision and power, see Benton (2002) and Barton (2002), with counter-argument by Webb (2008), 168. Barton (2002), 219 notes that the eyes, like the genitals, were conceived as 'both extremely vulnerable and extremely aggressive'.

[93] Webb (2008); Zanobi (2008a).

[94] Webb (2008), with bibliography. Lib. 64.118 describes the dancer as follows: 'he whirls around as though on wings, and arrives at a motionless pose as though glued in place; and with the pose, the image appears.'

more directly its physical expression elicited responses from the bodies of those sitting in the *cavea*.

At first glance, Seneca has nothing to do with pantomime,[95] but Bernhard Zimmermann and Alessandra Zanobi have independently identified closer connections than previously considered. Both scholars argue that Seneca's 'running commentaries' describing the appearance and movement of characters in crisis resemble the typical pantomime technique of juxtaposing the physical animation of a state of mind with its verbal exposition.[96] Zanobi stops short of proposing that Senecan tragedies were actually used as pantomime libretti, and draws the less speculative conclusion that they appear 'suggestive of a poet producing verse with gestural and choreographic accompaniment in mind.'[97] If, however, these plays were staged in antiquity, *tragoedia saltata* provides an onstage outlet more suitable than any other conjectural form of production, especially for certain episodes; in which case, it is the triangular relationship of singer, dancer and auditor which should provide the default for discussions of Seneca's Roman theatricality.

Recent work by Ruth Webb and Ismene Lada-Richards, in particular, has done much to redeem the *saltator* of pantomime from the obscurity imposed by the ephemerality of his medium.[98] The pantomime libretto, however, remains elusive. We have no surviving examples and only a few passing references to the kind of material used, which appears to be generally literary and of outstanding quality: Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *poemata*, and a lost *Agave* by Statius all provided the storylines and in all probability the lyrics for documented

[95] So Herington (1966), 444 addresses the question of performance 'leaving aside the intervening quasi-theatrical phenomena which also delighted Neronian audiences, the mime, the pantomime, the operatic rehashes of scenes or parts from Greek drama.' Boyle (2011), xlii likewise states that 'The purpose of the tragedies was clearly not to serve as a collection of arias or pantomimic adjuncts,' a proposition 'vitiated by the theatricality of these plays.' *Tragoedia saltata*, however, as I hope to show, is not incompatible with theatricality.
[96] Zimmermann (2008), Zanobi (2008a).
[97] Zanobi (2008a), 235.
[98] Webb (2008); Lada-Richards (2007). However, for earlier studies see also Jory (2004) & (1996); for a wide range of perspectives see the articles collected in Hall & Wyles (2008).

performances.[99] According to Lucian, the dancer 'will not be ignorant of anything that is told by Homer and Hesiod and the best poets, and above all tragedy' (*Salt*. 61). Jory comments that early pantomime libretti 'were frequently valuable literary works, adapted from the best epic or tragic poets of the past or freshly composed by the best poets of the age'.[100] It therefore seems perverse to suppose that a text adopting the form of tragedy, with episodes so congenial to pantomimic interpretation, would not have been circulated in the period's most popular entertainment medium. It may furthermore be conjecturally suggested that given the rather cavalier application of generic terminology by medieval commentators to classical texts, the dramaturgical idiosyncrasies of the Senecan corpus may be explained if these texts are not in fact *tragoediae* but rather *fabulae salticae*.

The idea that Senecan text was designed to be sung by a *cantor* while a dancer interpreted it with gestures is attested in later periods. In his c.1315 commentary on *Hercules Furens*, Nicholas Treveth describes how a *mimus* played the part of Juno while another performer delivered her speech;[101] this arrangement is reiterated in more detail by Pietro Alighieri:

> Antiquitus in theatro, quod erat area semicircularis, et in eius medio erat domuncula, quae scaena dicebatur, in qua erat pulpitum, et super id ascendebat poeta ut cantor, et sua carmina ut cantiones recitabat. Extra vero erant mimi, id est, ioculatores, carminum pronuntiationem gestu corporis effigiantes per adaptionem ad quemlibet ex cuius persona ipse poeta loquebatur; unde cum loquebatur, pone de Iunone

[99] Virgil's *Aeneid*: Suet. *Nero* 49; Ovid's *poemata*, *Trist*. 2.519; Statius' (lost) *Agave*: Juv. *Sat*. 7.86-87; Vacca's *Vita Lucani* 65 mentions that Lucan composed a number of *salticae fabulae*. For discussion see relevant chapters in Hall & Wyles (ed. 2008). Hall (2008) proposes the "Barcelona *Alcestis*", a fourth-century 'compressed Greek tragedy' in hexameters, as an alternative model.
[100] Jory (2008), 161.
[101] Treveti (1959), 5-6. This account is accompanied by an illustration showing the semicircular *theatrum* and a full cast of *mimi* gesturing in response to the words of the *poeta*, who reads from a lectern, occupying a booth centre stage.

> conquerente de Hercule priuigno suo, mimi, sicut recitabat, ita effigiebant Iunonem invocare furias infernales ad imfestandum ipsum Herculem; et si tale pulpitum seu domunculam ascendebat poeta qui de more uilico caneret, talis cantus dicebatur comoedia.
>
> ['The ancient theatre was a semicircular area, in the middle of which was a little structure called the *scaena*, on which there was a platform. The poet would ascend this like a singer, and recite his poems as though they were songs. And around it were mimes – that is, actors – representing with physical gesture the poem being delivered by conforming themselves to whatever character the poet spoke about. When he spoke about Juno conquering her step-son Hercules, the mimes, while he was reciting, presented Juno summoning the infernal Furies to attack Hercules himself. When a poet ascended this platform or structure and sang, in the manner of someone in charge, this song was called a *comoedia*.'][102]

It is likely that both Treveth and Alighieri derived this account from a reference to ancient performance in the *Etymologies* of sixth-century cleric Isidore of Seville.[103] Isodore's list of theatrical professions (*Etym*. 18.44-50) includes *tragoedi*, who sing (*concinebant*) about the crimes of ancient kings, *histriones* or specialist female impersonators, and *mimi*, who perform the physical action of a plot read out by their *auctor*. The closest Isidore comes to describing pantomime, however, is his assertion that the stage is where *poetae comoedi et tragoedi ad certamen conscendebant, hisque canentibus alii gestus edebant* (*Etym.* 18.44). This appears to be the source of Treveth's suggestion and Alighieri's consolidation, although the application of Isidore's model to Seneca appears to originate with Treveth himself. It cannot,

[102] Alighieri (1978), 8-9.
[103] Cunliffe (1912), 14 raises this possibility under a section entitled "A Curious Error".

of course, be taken as evidence for first-century performances of this type, but if Isidore is preserving a record of late antique practice then it may at least sustain the possibility.

When examining the play of space in Roman tragedy, it is important to consider the precise physical surroundings in which performances typically occurred. Although pantomime could be adapted in scale for almost any venue, from the 90-metre Theatre of Pompey to a private dining room,[104] its most common form utilised the public stage. Rome when Seneca was writing offered three mainstream performance venues: the Theatre of Pompey, the Theatre of Marcellus and the Theatre of Balbus, as well as eventually Nero's personal theatre, the Auditorium of Maecenas, and other private theatres attached to elite villas.[105] The entertainment industry was conducted on a massive scale: 175 major theatre sites have been identified in Italy alone, and according to Vitruvius the theatre should be the first municipal building established in a new-founded city after the forum (*De Arch.* 5.3.1). Imperial theatres in southern Italy and the eastern empire were often adapted from existing Hellenistic structures, but took a rather different form. The *cavea* was extended to join the *scaena*, sealing off the *eisodoi* and creating an enclosed space. Moreover, instead of an open landscape containing civic or religious buildings stretching away beyond the equivalent Greek *skene*, immediately behind the shallow Roman stage reared up the elaborate *scaenae frons* itself.[106] No longer used by performers, the orchestra was filled with seating for magistrates and other dignitaries.[107] The whole display took place on a narrow strip of stage overshadowed by three storeys of columns, niches, sculpture and exotic materials. Pliny

[104] Csapo & Slater (1994), 275-81 on 'the privatization of theatre at Rome'; Seneca *QNat.* 7.32.3 mentions private stages; Plut. *Quaest. Conv*. 621b-622a and 711b-713 discusses the place dancing and other entertainments at dinner. Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis* (itself another kind of performance) burlesques the practice.
[105] Sear (2005), 57-67, 46, 137.
[106] Wiles (2003), 40: 'Since Greek theatre was concerned with relations between the human and the divine, it was important to see actors stamping on the beaten earth, gazing into the sky, and standing before a wild and open landscape or seascape… The Romans enclosed their theatrical stages within high walls, and used an awning to shut out the sun, so insulating the festive or tragic world of the play from the natural world and from everyday life.'
[107] Although adapted in some theatres for beast-fights and/or *naumachia*, especially in later centuries.

reports that a temporary theatre erected by Marcus Scaurus in 58 BC had some 360 columns in its *scaenae frons* made from marble, gilded wood and glass, an unheard-of luxury (*inaudito etiam postea genere luxuriae*), as well as three thousand bronze statues (*HN*. 36.113-15). Sharing the stage with the dancer and singer/s could be more or less elaborate machinery. The *pegma* (crane) and *periaktoi* (revolving panels) familiar from Hellenistic stages were joined by hydraulics, trapdoors which allowed apparitions and scenery to emerge, and entire sets which could collapse or burn on cue.[108] Although these special effects seem to have generally been used in mime, not pantomime, they were nonetheless available, and contributed to the overall impression of the Roman theatre as sensory assault. The audience, in Sear's reconstruction,

> gazed down on the wealthy and powerful seated around the rim of the orchestra, the presiding magistrates in their boxes close to the stage, the stage decked out with fine hangings and scenery, the majestic tiers of marble columns rising behind, the inscriptions with their message of imperial power… The scene building offered unparalleled opportunities for ostentatious display.[109]

As Margerete Bieber comments, '*Es gibt keinen besseren Rahmen für Aufführungen von Senecas Tragödien als die scaenae frontes*.'[110] The lavish surroundings offered a perfect complement to Seneca's hyperbolic discourse with its frequent self-flagellating criticism of luxury and excess.

Roman theatres were not used exclusively for pantomime, and pantomime was not performed exclusively in Roman theatres. It could also be scaled down for inclusion in

[108] Sen. *Ep.* 88.22; Mart. *Spect*.; Suet., *Nero* 11.1.
[109] Sear (2005), 12.
[110] ['There is no better place for the performance of Seneca's tragedies than the *scaenae frontes*.'] Bieber (1953-54), 104.

programs of dinner entertainment, while tragic excerpts could be rigged out magnificently for competitive festival presentation. Nero himself is reported to have sung a number of roles in this fashion, including Oedipus Blinded and Hercules *Furens* (Suet. *Nero* 21). Staging a complete tragedy *qua* "tragedy" - that is, with a full cast and chorus, all sporting gold robes and gaping masks and high *cothurnoi* - appears to have been uncommon, if not entirely incompatible with contemporary expectations.[111] The "actor" (*ille qui in scaena incedit*) who is disparaged in Seneca's *Epistles* as a slave made up to resemble a king (*Ep*. 80.7-8) could as easily be a soloist as a member of an ensemble; whereas mimes still required a whole company, the vogue in tragedy favoured individual artists. *Trageodia cantata*, like pantomime, directed attention very much towards the star performer.[112] Senecan drama, with its drawn-out climaxes and episodic structure, its megalomaniac protagonists and in particular its substitution of monologue for staged interaction, seems well-adapted to this type of fragmented, non-linear concert *bricolage* as well as the trance-like synaesthesia afforded by a full-length *tragoedia saltata*. Swaying to the rise and fall of the musical line,[113] confronting the extravagant façade with its large-print statement of absolute power, the audience had no point of reference other than the stage itself.[114] Focus then funneled down to a single human figure, which not only held the attention of up to ten thousand spectators but fashioned their multitudinous passions into supple, studied form.

[111] This was not the case in the late Republic, but Goldberg (1996) argues for the divergence of tragedy and spectacle in the early Empire. *Citharoedia* was another channel through which tragic monologue reached the stage, but its emphasis was more musical than physical, so it is not considered in detail here. Csapo & Slater (1994), 369-70 draw a useful contrast between *tragoedia*, pantomime and choral performance (although allowing that choruses could accompany pantomime, and a *tragoedus* could have an interlocutor). Beacham (1999) 233-36 similarly divides Roman tragic performance into *tragoedia saltata*, *tragoedia cantata* and *citharoedia*, with mime forming a separate category. See also Kelly (1979), 21-28 and Jones (1991), 195. Lucian 27-31 gives a full, if satirical account of the *saltata* / *cantata* distinction, while maintaining that ἀι δὲ ὑποθέσις κοιναὶ ἀμφοτέροις.

[112] See Beacham (1999), 158-59 regarding the riots centred on popular dancers that regularly led to the expulsion of pantomimes from Rome.

[113] Molloy (1996) includes a useful appendix on the instruments and musical accompaniments used in pantomime. The argument that 'music has a direct ethical effect upon its listeners' is attested from Plato onwards; for sources see Csapo & Slater (1994), 343ff.

[114] Beacham (1999), 231 'the total architectural enclosure afforded by the structural unity of the Roman theatre… was thus joined to a form of rigid psychological containment to create a totalitarian artwork.'

We can now examine, with pantomime in mind, some passages of Seneca which illustrate various aspects of their affinity with the performance genre: commentaries on characters in crisis, catalogues of mythological exempla, ecphrasis of landscape, and the power dynamics produced by placing the body at the mercy of the voice. The classic example of silent action accompanied by verbal description is Medea's *furor*:[115]

> Incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit
> cum iam recepto maenas insanit deo
> Pindi nivalis vertice aut Nysae iugis,
> talis recursat huc et huc motu effero,
> furoris ore signa lymphati gerens.
> Flammata facies, spiritum ex alto citat,
> proclamat, oculos uberi fletu rigat,
> renidet; omnis specimen affectus capit.
> Haeret minatur aestuat queritur gemit (*Med*. 382-90).

The final line, with its string of asyndeta, is particularly reminiscent of the *Anthologia* poet's equally concise rendition of pantomimic bipolarity: *pugnat ludit amat bacchatur vertitur adstat* (*Anth. Lat.* 100.7). The comparison to Bacchic mania also seems a common one. Cassandra, entering her prophetic fit, is likewise referred to as a *maenas*, and suffers a similar loss of self-control: *Silet repente Phoebas et pallor genas / creberque totum possidet corpus tremor* (*Ag*. 710-11). Her breath heaves, like Medea's, and her eyes roll back (Sen. *Ag*. 713-15). During these and other such episodes, in which the subject is usually female and

[115] Zimmermann (2008) and Zanobi (2008a) both discuss this passage.

invariably in a state of agitation if not altogether incapacitated,[116] the personal agency of the performer is compromised. Split apart from the bodiless voice which directs it, the body which acts has lost the privilege of autonomy. This is, of course, an illusion – the *saltator* is in complete choreographic control of his anatomy, while the *cantor*'s vocalization demands no less physical effort than that of an opera singer – but it is an illusion which plays perfectly into the Senecan ideology of masochistic passion.

In addition, a number of choral passages lend themselves to the dynamics of concurrent *descriptio*. *Phaedra* 296-352 illustrates the irresistibility of Eros with a series of increasingly burlesque vignettes: Apollo's *servitium amoris*, Jupiter's several disguises, Hercules' transvestism and a whole menagerie of animals on heat. Lucian attests that pantomime frequently depicted 'the love affairs of all the gods, and especially those of Zeus' (*Salt.* 59). Pantomime artists are recorded as relishing incongruities such as Apollo in love or an effeminate Hercules; one of the *saltator*'s disturbing qualities, for the early Christian moralists, was his androgyny, his supple male body that could become pliant and flirtatious.[117] The second ode of the *Phaedra*, a profound meditation on the fragility of *forma*, shares this preoccupation with male physicality, focused in this instance on Hippolytus. The chorus compare him first of all to elemental forces, to an *insanae procellae* and a comet (736-40), and then to another catalogue of divine *exempla*: Phoebe, Lucifer and Bacchus, each of whom would, according to Lucian, possess a distinct, readily identifiable pantomimic persona.[118] This is followed by a Salmacis-like scene in which *Naïades improbae* lure the attractive youth into a deceptively limpid pool (776-84), and finally an encomium addressed to Hippolytus himself, imagined as a marble statue with the physique of Mars or Hercules,

[116] *Phaed*. 583-86; *Troad*. 949-54; *Ag*. 775-78; *HF*. 1042-50, 1082-91. Zanobi (2008a) discusses the prevalence of female incapacitation, with a close examination of *Ag*. 710-19.
[117] Anecdote from Macrob. *Sat*. 2.7.13-14. On the dangerous effeminacy of pantomime dancers, see Webb (2008), 77-79 and Lada-Richards (2007), 69-70. On "Apollo in love" as a pantomime subject, see Lucian, *Salt*. 45 and Ingleheart (2008), 212.
[118] Lucian, *Salt*. 37-61

adopting a quick succession of virile poses (riding, hunting, archery). None of this invites group enactment. On the other hand, it powerfully suggests a single performer slipping from role to role like a *tableau vivant*, his gestures not literally illustrative but complementarily suggestive of the vain Bacchus, the wilting meadow, the lascivious nymph, the Parthian archer. The focus here is not on the group but on the individual whose attributes are picked out one by one by the vocal line. This catalogue effect, which arranges multiple episodic images around a given subject, is prevalent throughout Seneca's dramatic corpus. The associated similes often feature a single mythological archetype (such as Bacchus) or a natural phenomenon in motion (a lightning bolt, a lily *languescens*). This technique provides the *saltator* with his verbal score. Whereas the more extended descriptive passages allow for the development of a single emotional state, these cascades of *exempla* appeal to the other noted attribute of pantomime, its rapid transitions from frame to frame.

As well as an extensive repertoire of mythological characters, pantomime dancers also appear to have portrayed more abstract states, including landscapes. Lucian rationalises Proteus into the archetypal *saltator*, able to imitate fire, water and trees as well as various animals, 'just like the dancers of today' (*Salt*. 19). When Libanius depicts the dancer constructing a pastoral ecphrasis, he breaks it down into individual components:

> In any kind of picture, what meadow is a more pleasant sight (ἥδιον θέαμα) than that of the dance and the dancer when he leads the spectator around into the groves, and lulls herds of cattle to sleep under the trees, placing goats at pasture, flocks and shepherds in charge of the animals, some working at their tasks to the syrinx, others to the aulos? (64.116).

This may be usefully compared to the pastoral pastiche in the first lyric passage of *Hercules Furens*:

> Pastor gelida cana pruina
> grege dimisso pabula carpit;
> ludit prato liber aperto
> nondum rupta fronte iuvencus
> vacuae reparant ubera matres;
> errat cursu levis incerto
> molli petulans haedus in herba. (139-46)

The spectator is here 'led around' the meadow (*prato*) and shown in sequence, as in Libanius, the cattle and goats at pasture (*in herba*) and the shepherd (*pastor*) who tends them. If we accept that pantomime could express not only the qualities of people but the qualities of places, whole vistas of Seneca open up for this kind of performance.[119] Libanius is anxious to stress the calming influence of the bucolic scene, but according to Lucian, audiences also enjoyed less insipid topoi; a favourite subject of pantomime was the Underworld (*Salt*. 60). Considered as an accompaniment to dance, a passage like Theseus' ecphrasis of Hades (*HF* 658-827) becomes far more convincing than the same speech envisaged as a naturalistic report.

When regarding Thyestes lolling and drooling, dangling like a puppet on the string of Atreus' authority, it can now be seen how such a power relationship could be realised not only within the text but via the superiority of controlling voice to mouthless body; the

[119] Zanobi (2008b), 176 compares Seneca's surreal but thematically expressive settings to the equally non-literal expressiveness of pantomime, pointing out that 'such a landscape - an often imaginary and phantasmagorical atmosphere - may not be portrayed as materially evident by means of theatrical business… The mime or pantomime that was performed could move in a fluid imaginary setting more evocative than concrete, and created by the words of the libretti.'

dancer's mask cannot speak, only his articulate(d) limbs.[120] Depriving a subject of speech, as Scarry has shown, and forcibly severing somatic self from conscious utterance, is the fundamental basis of torture.[121] Even when Thyestes "sings", his words issue from the *cantor*'s tongue. This particular torment is of course transient, because in a single swift metamorphosis the dancer will take on Atreus, but his authority nevertheless remains illusory throughout. As Poe has argued, Atreus (like many Senecan protagonists) is driven by forces other than his own will to commit the atrocities which appease but never entirely fulfill his insatiate craving: appetite, mania, Furies, the Tantalid curse.[122] *Tumultus pectora attonitus quatit / penitusque volvit; rapior et quo nescio, / sed rapior*, confesses the arch-villain (*Thy*. 260-62). Similarly, the *saltator* allows himself to be seized and shaken by the sonorous pronouncement of the singer/s, fixing momentarily in human motion the vast coverage of the song. Everyone in that theatre feels that sound pass through them, that irresistible whirlwind (*Thy* 621-25),[123] but only the dancer trains it into focused movement. If Senecan tragedy repeatedly fights the battle, repeatedly lost, of self against passion, willpower against narrative imperative, or sense against universal chaos,[124] there could be few more effective means of staging such conflict than a single, silenced, bravura figure wringing out the pain inflicted by a torrential flood of speech.

## Conclusion

As stated at the outset of this chapter, this is not an overtly political interpretation of the tragedies, sidestepping their representation of tyranny and their firm association of power with corruption. Nevertheless, some speculative conclusions may be drawn regarding the

[120] Lucian *Salt*. 28 describes the dancer's mask with its closed mouth. See Webb (2008).
[121] Scarry (1985).
[122] Poe (1969), 363.
[123] Messenger-speeches could also be enacted as pantomime: *Anth. Pal*. 16.289 mentions a *saltator* performing the *angelos* among other roles from the *Bacchae*.
[124] Pratt (1963); Herington (1966), 449ff; Tarrant (1985), 24; see also relevant articles in Boyle (1983), and Schiesaro (2003) on the repetition compulsion that distorts the passage of Senecan time.

compromised autonomy of the human subject as figured in the performance media associated with Seneca's Roman context. As material for *recitatio*, the play-texts join a venerable tradition of oral discourse perceived as having the capacity to infiltrate and captivate its audience against their conscious will: *thelxis*, *ekplexis*, the foot that taps and the head that pounds to an irresistible beat, the erotic charge, the melting. Language acts upon the body in the imperative mood, and surrender is figured as pleasurable, if somewhat dangerous. As *fabulae salticae*, the play-texts contribute to an art form predicated on a similar premise: the body is objectified, while speech from an external source is afforded kinetic as well as conceptual authority. As outlined in the Introduction, this loss of somatic control or self-containment constitutes an important part of the senecan aesthetic. It cannot be stated with absolute certainty whether these were in fact the media used for performing Senecan/senecan tragedy in first-century Rome, but they appear to represent a default not only substantially plausible but consistently supportive of key thematic and dramaturgical features. The conditions which established Senecan drama produced a theatrical form whose acute strangeness is sometimes worn down to a semblance of familiarity by the permutations it has accrued over subsequent centuries. In situating this form within what is known about first-century theatrical practice, we have established a working paradigm that facilitates comparison with later performance contexts.

## Chapter 2

## THE OPEN BOOK

In universities and schoolrooms during the sixteenth century, the study of ancient texts involved not only memorization and written *imitatio*, but physical activation. Reading aloud, declaiming, and applying the principles of oratorical *actio* brought students into regular bodily contact with the vestiges of antiquity. Alongside classroom tuition, extracurricular drama provided a complementary means of physical engagement with ancient texts for both actors and audience. Seneca's plays, along with those of Plautus, Terence and occasionally the Greek tragedians were staged as part of festivities at Oxford and Cambridge from 1551 onwards.[1] At the same time, neo-Latin tragedies were produced which made liberal use of Seneca's diction, dramaturgy and style. Rather than subjecting ancient text to scrutiny or uninflected transmission, neo-Latin playwrights engaged in dialogue: filling the gaps, reproducing stylistic features, applying senecan discourse to new referents. Their approach, as Bradner puts it, 'was to choose a subject from ancient legend or history which Seneca had not used and then to treat it as they thought Seneca would have done.'[2] An excellent example of this is William Gager's *Meleager*, which reproduces with particular acuteness the senecan interaction of voice and body. James Calfhill's *Progne* participates in a more complex series of receptions which includes a play replete with the dangers of classical *exempla*, *Titus Andronicus*. Recognising and seeking to harness the psychagogic properties of theatre for religious purposes, Jesuit colleges arranged Biblical episodes in Senecan form for performance by their adolescent pupils. With somewhat more worldly ambitions, headmaster-producer Richard Mulcaster trained the boys of St Paul's School to perform declamatory

[1] Norland (2009), 46-47 gives a useful chronology of the Senecan plays performed in Latin during the 1550s and 1560s. In Cambridge: *Troades* (Trinity, 1551-52) and Queen's, 1560); *Oedipus* (Trinity, 1559-60); *Medea* (Trinity, 1560-61 and Queen's, 1563). In Oxford: *Octavia* (Christ Church, 1588); and Gager's *Hippolytus* (Christ Church, 1591-92). See also Nelson (1989), 966-69. Nelson does not list the 1563 *Medea*, but it is attested by Moore Smith (cited in Binns: 1974, 206).
[2] Bradner (1957), 32.

tragedy such as John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* for aristocratic patrons. Whether regarded as a source of educational empowerment or seductive falsification, rhetorical discourse was perceived in this period as a means of moulding impressionable bodies and minds. The senecan aesthetic therefore became a tempting target for proscription as well as appropriation.

## A defence of student theatre

Neo-Latin university drama was extracurricular. Nevertheless, it pursued the double pedagogical goals of resurrecting the classical past and developing the student's linguistic fluency. Performance consisted of rhetorical declamation, but skillful declamation involved not uninflected ranting but embodied vocality, as laid out by Quintilian. Speech is a demanding physical act from which the speaker's whole body is never divorced, its purpose to move an audience to tears or admiration, inducing the 'flexanimous' state deplored by opponents of the stage.[3] In this aesthetic mode, illusion was generated not by the actors alone but through the communal struggle of everyone present to reconcile conflicting streams of auditory and visual information. This participatory transaction was encouraged by the framing of university drama as both exclusive and amateur. The performance belonged to a festival occasion celebrated by a particular speech community whose members could reinforce social bonds through their attendance and appreciation.[4]

The practice of translating Greek plays into senecan-flavoured Latin for educational purposes began with George Buchanan's 1544 *Medea*.[5] Although Buchanan follows

[3] Such William Prynne in his *Histrio-Mastix* (1633).
[4] On the speech community of university drama, see Smith (1988) and Briscoe & Coldeway (1989). Also Smith (1999), 271 on how in a more technical sense 'actor and audience share the same field of sound.'
[5] This was written and performed in Bordeaux, but Buchanan had a reputation as a dramatist and scholar on both sides of the Channel. See Green & Ford (2009), xix-xxii. Chevalier (2009), 185 argues that while Buchanan certainly makes use of Seneca, 'he enriches Seneca's tragic diction with borrowings from what is often a highly erudite, not to say rare, Latin vocabulary.'

Euripides scrupulously, his vocabulary is drawn from the register occupied by Seneca. Compare, for example, Euripides' description of Medea's rage:

> ἤδη γὰρ εἶδον ὄμμα νιν ταυρουμένην
> τοῖσδ', ὥς τι δρασείουσαν· οὐδὲ παύσεται
> χόλου, σάφ' οἶδα, πρὶν κατασκῆψαί τινι. (Eur. *Med*. 92-94)[6]

with Buchanan's, which contains keywords not found in Euripides, but characteristic of Seneca:

> ira frementem nuper, oculis flammis
> vidi minantem nescio quid istis; neque
> imponet irae frena donec quempiam
> feriat (*Med*. 96-99).[7]

*Irata, minax* and *fremens* are applied to Seneca's Medea throughout, and she displays a *flammata facies* at 387, although it is Phaedra's sea-monster whose *flammam vomunt / oculi* explicitly (1040-41).[8] As Nussbaum has shown, *flammae* and *frena* are also part of Medea's metaphorical equipage.[9] *Nescio quid* is a particularly charged Senecan phrase, used of the as-yet submerged sea-monster at *Phaed*. 1019 and of Atreus' as-yet unspecified revenge at *Thy*. 267.[10] In most contexts, single words could hardly be counted as senecan, but in a Latin

[6] ['Just now, I saw her eying them like a bull, / like she would do… something. Her anger / will not cease, that I know, before it strikes somewhere.']
[7] 'Just now, I saw her maddened with rage, eyes flaming, / threatening them with I know not what; and she will not / rein in her rage until it bears her / somewhere.
[8] cf *Med*. 388, *oculos… rigant*; *Phaed*. 380, *oculi… micant*; and *Oed*. 958-59, *ardent minaces igne truculentos genae / oculique*.
[9] Nussbaum (1997), 233.
[10] Cf. Legge, *Richardus Tertius* 2.1.183-84: *Nescio quid animus triste praesagit malum / horrent timore membra, cor pavet metu*.

*Medea* containing very little vocabulary that does not occur in Seneca – and often meshing together loaded signifiers such as *cruenta, flammae, pectus, ferrum, dolor, nefanda* – it cannot escape the trailing history of the words it is generically constrained to employ. A similar phenomenon occurs in Buchanan's Biblical tragedies. Iephthes, for example, trapped by a thoughtless vow into sacrificing his daughter, begs in the words of Senecan victims Theseus and Oedipus to be consumed in her place:

> Aut tu, cruorem virginalem innoxium
> potura tellus, hisce patulos in specus
> sinuque vasto me vora: dum non nocens
> perire possum, quolibet me obrue loco.
> Vel ipsum adire non recuso Tartarum,
> modo parricida Tartarum non incolam.
> Quid Tartarum aio? Tartarus mihi est domi (*Ieph*. 845-51).[11]

Theseus pleads to be swallowed up by the *ultimo… sinu* of the *vasti maris* (*Phaed*. 1204-05); *dehisce tellus,* pleads Oedipus (*Oed*. 868). Homecoming to a *domus* comparable to Tartarus is a central motif in *Phaedra* and *Hercules Furens*. For Buchanan, Senecan diction was the natural language of tragedy, dispersing elements of the plays into entirely new contexts.

Historical pageant-plays such as Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* (1580) and Matthew Gwynne's *Nero* (1603) also used Senecan diction to express senecan themes.[12] William Alabaster's 1592 *Roxana*, based on an Italian tragedy of blood, translated its source-

[11] ['Or you, Earth, about to drink innocent / virgin blood, / open up a gaping cave / and devour me with your vast gullet: if I can die / innocent, bury me wherever you like. / I would not even refuse Tartarus, / if I could reside there not yet a kin-killer. / Why do I call on Tartarus? My home is Tartarus to me.']
[12] On Gwynne, see Binns (1974), 215-224. *Nero* was rejected by St John's College but written for performance.

text back into distinctly Senecan Latin.[13] *Roxana* is notable for an incident attested at its Trinity (Cambridge) performance, where a 'gentlewoman' in the audience 'at the hearing of the last words thereof, *Sequar, sequar* so hideously pronounced, fell distracted and never recovered her senses.'[14] Among neo-Latin expressions of the senecan aesthetic, the work of scholar-dramatist William Gager stands out. Gager's 1591 *Hippolytus*, which otherwise reproduces Seneca's text, adds three new scenes: a supernatural prologue in which Megaera frames the plot as retribution for Theseus' extramarital lust, and two additional attempts on Hippolytus' chastity: one by the aptly named 'Pandarus', and the other by a Nymph who personifies *Phaedra*'s choral warning (777-83) about the sexuality tainting Hippolytus' virgin forest. Gager's Latin draws on a typically Senecan vocabulary and savours the effects of pleonasm peppered with the odd sharp antithesis: *Mors tegi affectum fuit, / et mors repelli*, wails the Nymph at 324-25. Hippolytus retaliates with a tirade against Amor:

> *quo nulla terris gravior incubit lues!*
> *Insania diuturna, lymphatus furor,*
> *blandum venenum, militia turpis, ignum*
> *servile, pax infida, sollicitum mare,*
> *negotium otiosum, iners delirium,*
> *damnosa morum pestis, obscaenus calor,*
> *ignaviae magister, et scelerum artifex* (189-95).[15]

[13] For example, the *locus horridus* in Act 4, or Atossa's rage in Act 3*: non sic ruit / Medea, laesi stimulo amoris saucia, / quando astra, et omnes ad suos gemitus Deos / deduxit: hoc maior mihi incumbit dolor, / furorque maior*. See Norland (2009) and Binns (1974), 207-15 for comment.
[14] Binns (1974), 211-12; the earliest extant source for this is Fuller's entry on Alabaster in his 1840 *English Worthies*.
[15] e.g. *incubit, insania, lues, furor, ignum, mare, iners, delirium, pestis, obscaenus calor,* and *scelerum artifex*.

Many of these terms resonate so powerfully with *Phaedra*'s imagery, not to mention with other Senecan keywords, that to release them all at once is the equivalent of setting off a bomb in an echo chamber.

Academic *ludi scaenici*, as Gager's contemporary John Case asserted in his 1585 treatise on Aristotle's *Ethics*, should not be classed among idle diversions, since they provide their student participants with diverse benefits:

> *Propter memoriam antiquorum temporum, quam ad vivum representant;*
> *Propter multiplicem scientiam rerum, quam in se comprehendunt;*
> *Propter magnam experientiam, qua nos exornant;*
> *Propter vim vocis, gestus, & affectus quam optime depingunt;*
> *Propter delectabilem affabilitatis & comitatis usum, quem graphice ante oculos proponunt*.[16]
>
> [the recollection of ancient times, which they represent to the life;
> the diverse perspectives on the matters which they encompass;
> the profound experience with which they enrich us;
> the power of voice, gesture and emotion which they so excellently display;
> the pleasure of friendship and camaraderie, which they exhibit clearly before our eyes.]

Case identifies various levels in the actor's relationship to his work. Not at all intended to represent the ancient world 'to the life' in the manner of later costume drama, academic *ludi* as Case describes them constitute a 'memorial' to antiquity in the sense of perpetuating an

[16] Case (1585), 183.

ongoing presence.[17] Knowledge (*scientia*) does not reach its student performers in a didactic monotone, but through a heteroglossic (*multiplex*) amalgam of irreconcilable voices and opinions. Debating skills were thereby honed, as were the values imparted by interpreting one's role as a positive or negative *exemplum*.[18] The 'profound experience' in Case's next point commends classical tragedy for its engagement with a more intense or exalted mode of human existence: moral, sensory, metaphysical. Rather than simply reading the text, 'we' become involved in an *experientia*, suggesting that this kind of encounter offers a peculiar immediacy or intensity. We are enhanced, Case implies, by such encounters. We become something more. We transcend ourselves. Surpassing one's limits in terms of technique can also be empowering. These complex texts enable participants to show off to best effect their aptitude for capturing nuances of voice, gesture and what Case calls *affectus*. Whether *affectus* should be understood as emotion, or sincerity, or sensitivity, or enthusiasm, or ability to move the audience is not altogether clear, but Case evidently classes it along with physical and vocal capacity as a technical skill acquired by the actor in executing his role. Finally, there is the social aspect. Although conceivably referring to *exempla* within the plays (Orestes and Pylades come to mind), Case could equally be expressing his approval of the camaraderie and co-operation that develop within a cast. Received as a performance text, Seneca therefore mediated various forms of self-improvement through the performing body.

Not everyone appreciates student theatre. The volley of abuse exchanged by William Gager with self-appointed arbiter of morality John Rainolds between 1591 and 1593 highlights the distinction between literary and performance reception:

> If they [students] should not be suffered to peruse writings of base & filthy qualitie, nor to cast their eyes, as it were, upon them, much lesse should they engrave them by

[17] Rayner (2006). Compare Greene (1983) on Renaissance perceptions of mourning (or raising) the classical dead.
[18] Smith (1988); Braden (1985).

> heart in their rememberance, expresse them with voice, commend them with action, deliver them with boldness (Rainolds, *Overthrow*, p127).[19]

Leaving aside Rainolds' conventional objection to the racy content of classical drama,[20] his main anxiety arises from the physical and psychological affinity developed by the actors with their material, material no longer independent but 'engraved by heart', indelibly imprinted on its carriers with what he elsewhere calls 'a penne of iron, or with the point of a diamon' (p19). Such anxieties about the transformative capacity of drama go back as far as Plato's *Republic*.[21] If the identification becomes too close, scholarly interest collapses into personal entanglement. Furthermore, not only are the actors contaminated by appropriating text like this, but the text itself suffers under amateur clumsiness. Gager's caricature of a Rainolds-esque figure, the misanthropic "Momus" who delivers an epilogue for the *Hippolytus*, complains that:

> *Quis suas partes bene*
> *peregit actor? Quot soloecismi manu*
> *vultuque facti! Gestus huic nimius fuit,*
> *huic nullus, illi ineptus. Hunc vox extulit,*
> *destituit illum*.[22]

[19] Rainolds further comments, 'You aske Whether we thinke it a losse to recite Seneca: Not I, who have recited sundry of his veries upon occasion in my Lectures. But it is one thing to recite and an other thing to play.' (Rainolds, *Overthrow*, p22).
[20] Such as 'Phaedra incestuously embracing and endeavouring to inflame her sonne Hippolitus with love-speeches' (Rainolds, *Overthrow*, p21).
[21] Barish (1981).
[22] Gager, *Hipp*. 428-32: 'Which actor played his part well? How many blunders were committed in gesture and expression! This one overacted, this one not at all, and *that* one was completely inept. This one's voice was over the top, that one's failed.'

Momus' criticisms here read rather more like directors' notes than moral outrage. Whatever ideals inspired optimists like John Case, university drama remained a species of para-theatre: a self-contained community event, uncommercial, participatory and amateur.

Gager's *Meleager*, staged at Christ Church in 1582, illustrates a central element of the senecan aesthetic. This is the tendency of Senecan characters to dissociate themselves verbally from their physical condition, creating an almost third-person account of the body under discussion. What is described conflicts with what is seen. As Lois Potter points out, this 'direct challenge to the senses' is one of the most powerful devices of Elizabethan drama. No actor, Potter argues, could conform to Tamburlaine's superhero physique; no stage could bring on Agincourt; no simulated death could thoroughly convince.[23] Theatricality was not a matter of belief, but involvement. Resolving such a radical contradiction between aural and visual data requires enormous and sustained imaginative commitment. Whereas mimetic drama immerses the audience in its fictive world, this deliberate severance of sense from sense demands a fierce degree of active, interactive concentration.[24] It is also a peculiarly senecan trick. Senecan characters are regularly able to give extraordinarily articulate expression to physical distress. Seneca contains two categories of verbal/visual disjunction: those instances where a character or scene is described by another party, and those where characters describe their own internal sensations. This should be treated not as a dramaturgical flaw but as a deliberate, unsettling severance of the speaking voice from the speaking body.

The premise is not restricted to Seneca. Greek tragedy employs similar devices, particularly the messenger speech and the lyric chorus which redirect focus from the scene enacted towards images unrealized (or unrealizable) on the mimetic plane. Seneca, however,

[23] Potter (1991); see also Weimann (1991), 97: 'Elizabethan theatre appears… to thrive on the non-identity between performance and script, between the actor's body and the author's language, between theatrical symbols and dramatic meanings.'
[24] Compare Dupont (200) on 'ludic' or non-Aristotelian drama.

develops this technique until it forms a high proportion of his dramatic work, displacing the visceral into the verbal to produce a disorienting representational doubleness. One state in which it repeatedly occurs is that of a character in extreme physical distress. There is, according to Martin and Allard, 'something about pain that exceeds representation and troubles the smooth symmetry of the Aristotelian mimetic relationship'.[25] Pain is unrepresentable in these terms because it is essentially unshareable. It either reaches an extreme of mimetic identification and dissolves into inarticulate cries like Philoctetes or the *Revenger's* Duke (III.v.169, 176),[26] or brings the actor to a doubled, disjunctive state in which verbal imagery conveys his agony while his body *is doing something else*.[27]

Pain, as Elaine Scarry has argued, obliterates language.[28] Pain of the kind delivered on the senecan stage should prove impossible to experience consciously, let alone describe. A realistic representation, then, while retaining an actor's body as the site where pain becomes visually accessible, cannot allow to the voice any communicative power more structured than a scream. Senecan bodies, however, reconstitute their pain *as* language.[29] Senecan characters tend to be cast by *dolor* not into linguistic breakdown but into linguistic overdrive. When an intimate somatic sensation - wounding, terror, erotic desire - is being moulded into speech, it cannot simultaneously be mimetically enacted. In processing and embodying the language of pain, the senecan performer must therefore be engaged in something other than mimesis. Seneca's main departure from Greek precedent is to apply verbal commentary not only to events invisible offstage but to events enacted concurrently in the performance space.[30] As Tarrant has shown, this occurs regularly in Roman comedy and conjecturally also in pre-

[25] Martin & Allard (2009), 3.
[26] On staging Philoctetes' pain, see Budelmann (2007).
[27] Macintosh (1994), 105 shows that the process of death in Attic tragedy can involve similar alienation from the body, evinced by e.g. self-address.
[28] Scarry (1985), 4-5.
[29] See for example *Thy*. 1035-51 (Thyestes discovers what he has eaten); *Med* 797-811 (Medea slashes her arm); *Phoen*. 155-81 (Oedipus proposes to dig into his cranium through the sockets of his ruined eyes); *Troad*. 116-24 (Hecuba gouges her breasts); *Ag*. 131-38 (Clytemnestra experiences emotional turmoil as flames).
[30] This does occasionally happen in Greek tragedy, too, e.g. Soph. *Ant.* 441, and more frequently in Greek comedy such as Aristophanes, *Them.* 96-100, 130-45 and *Nub.* 185-94, but it is unusual.

Senecan Roman tragedy.[31] This representational redundancy has been treated as evidence for relegating Seneca to recitation alone,[32] but as studies of its reproduction on the Elizabethan stage have indicated, there is nothing redundant about overlaying an image with words that exceed it.[33] Indeed, because live theatre is the only medium where image and spoken discourse can productively intersect in this way - film, as Dessen has shown, lacks the necessary liberty from naturalism - [34] and where the conjunction of the speaking body with the spoken body configures a dilemma of perception, it could be argued that these peculiarly senecan moments are also profoundly, supremely theatrical.

Without identifying it as senecan, Kent Cartwright points to this conflict of verbal and visual data in the extraordinary scene during which Meleager describes the sensations of being burned alive.[35] Unlike his Ovidian counterpart, who is dispatched in ten efficient lines (*Met.* 8.515-25), Gager's Meleager first feels the heat at line 1366, and finally crawls off to die in decent seclusion at 1457. Most of this passage consists of elaborate verbal dilations on his own physical distress. Its main model is *Hercules Oetaeus*, now considered spurious but transmitted to the Renaissance stage as a genuine member of the Senecan corpus. *Heu quis relicta Scorpios caeli plaga / Cancerve torrens viscera exurit mea*? (1386-87) Meleager asks, echoing Hercules' similar *Eheu quis intus Scorpios, quis fervida / plaga revulsus Cancer infixus meas / urit medullas*? (*HO* 1218-20). While Hercules wishes he had been destroyed by any of the monsters overcome in his Labours (*HO* 1192-97), Meleager wishes that 'Oetaean poison' could be playing havoc in his blood (*Mel.* 1399-1400) in preference to what he perceives as 'ignominious pain' (*ignavus dolor*, 1403). Other Senecan intertexts flicker briefly; Meleager's reaction to the first stroke of flame, *Sed quid hoc*? (1366) comes straight out of the mouth of Hercules *Furens* feeling the first stroke of insanity (*HF*. 939), and he

[31] Tarrant (1978).
[32] Hollingsworth (2001); Eliot (1951) [1927a], 69-70.
[33] Cartwright (1999), 197-210 on *Tamburlaine*; Dessen (1989) on *Titus Andronicus*.
[34] Dessen (1989), 47.
[35] Cartwright (1999), 209-10.

even channels *Phaedra*: *Alitur et crescit lues*, he complains, *et urit intus, qualis Aetnaeo vapor exundat antro* (1383-85; compare *Phaed*. 101-03). An erotic dimension to Meleager's burning was postulated by his companion Philemon at the onset, who suggests that *amore nempe totus Atalantae cales* (1372), confusing the metaphorical flames of *amor* with the all-too-real flames kindled elsewhere onstage.

Meleager represents his pain in three stages: somatic prologue, reflective interlude and delirious finale. He begins by displaying the physical symptoms, *cerebrum repente corripitur aestu gravi* (1368), which progresses down his sides into *viscera et renes, per venas, medullas*, and so on (1371-77). Like Phaedra, he tears off the clothing whose constriction he can no longer stand, underscoring the allusion with his reference to Aetna, then shifts into Herculean mode to lament the disgrace of such a death. At this point, Althaea withdraws the brand from the hearth, allowing Meleager to temporarily recover and reflect on the cause of his condition: *quid esse credam? Virus? An potius tamen / me fascinari? An aliquod est aliud nefas*? (1409-10). Althaea then thrusts the brand back in, and Meleager's pain returns full force, expressed this time through delirious visions. The Calydonian boar, he believes, is trampling through his insides, along with the entire hunt – in other words, he contains the play we have just been watching – but he retains enough detachment to recognise the absence of any natural provocation: *et nihil est tamen* ('and yet there's nothing there,' 1433). Out of a similar "nothing", out of a similar web of fascination consisting of nothing but language, the actor must generate his own physical responses to Gager's text. Finally, Meleager sees the Furies and his uncles' ghosts rise up from Tartarus, and accompanies them offstage. Gager then supplies an unusually explicit stage direction: *aliqua mora sit stipiti cremando, ut in morte Meleagri decorum servetur* (1456-57). After the hysteria and the frenzy, in contrast to the torrent of speech, death itself is not disclosed. Focus contracts instead to the brand on the fire, continuing to crumble, veins glowing red, embers

flickering out in real time one by one until Althaea raises her head and breaks the spell: *Bene est. Peractum est* (1458).[36] It's done. Fire has somehow consumed the body without leaving a visible trace. *Ecce,* Meleager kept repeating, *ecce*. Look, I'm on fire; see, my liver is parched and my lungs are burning, my blood is turning to steam – just like Hercules *Oetaeus* – but the more anatomically precise his words, the greater the disjunction between the agony they express and the evidently intact body expressing them. This discrepancy between verbal and visual content constitutes a theatrical aesthetic derived from Roman pantomime via Senecan tragic text, and indispensable to the Renaissance stage.

*Progne*

In *Meleager*, the verbal/visual split occurs within a single performer. It can also operate in a more unconsciously pantomimic fashion, where one character delivers a commentary on the appearance or actions of another. One infamous example of this kind of division occurs in *Titus Andronicus*: confronted by the mutilated Lavinia, Marcus issues a coloratura description of the injuries she is displaying, contrasting them to her former perfection (2.4.11-57). Attempting to communicate the circumstances of her rape, Lavinia turns to the story of Procne and Philomela. Although *Metamorphoses* 6.424-674 is Shakespeare's primary intertext - not only does Lavinia rely on Ovid to relate her trauma (4.1), but her injuries were perpetrated as a deliberate exaggeration of Philomela's (2.3.43; 2.4.26-27, 2.4.41-43) - it is nevertheless not the sole resource. In terms of dramatic precedent for a scenario in which sex-crime – *stuprum* – is punished by cannibalism, *Titus Andronicus* has a more complex history. This history runs back, via a pair of neo-Latin *Progne* plays, to Seneca's *Thyestes*. Serving a feast of murdered children in revenge for *stuprum* (named as such at *Thy*. 222, *Prog*. 386, 407, and *Titus* 4.1.79) provides the backbone for this group of plays, all of which dramatise a

[36] See *Oed*. 998 as well as *Med*. 1019.

more or less divergent version of *Metamorphoses* 6. Baker, seeking a 'purely Elizabethan' source for Shakespeare's 'native' drama argues that Ovid alone is the source-text, but Miola disagrees, identifying numerous tropes derived from Seneca.[37] Upon discovering the identity of Lavinia's attackers, Titus breaks into a variation of *Phaedra* 668-69: *Magni dominator poli, / Tam lentus audis scelera? Tam lentus vides?* (4.1.81-82). As Miola puts it, 'The action of revenge becomes a species of literary *imitatio*,'[38] and Seneca contributes to its realisation. Moreover, translation presents in dramaturgical as well as literary form. The material absence of James Calfhill's 1566 *Progne* - no manuscript survives, and it may never have been published - does not prevent it from contributing to a study in performance transmission.

The first definite performance of the *Titus Andronicus* attributed to Shakespeare was recorded in 1594, but a version of the play, the so-called "Old *Titus*", seems to have existed some years prior to this, possibly as early as 1589.[39] Conjecturally, this may have been the play by George Peele which contributed at least its first act to the *Titus Andronicus* known as Shakespeare's.[40] George Peele, like Marlowe and Nashe, was one of the 'university wits', moving from university drama at Christ Church College, Oxford to a career as a professional London playwright. Only five years before Peele matriculated, Christ Church had seen a performance of James Calfhill's neo-Latin *Progne*. Although the linear textual connection may be tenuous, a different kind of connection may be recognised, predicated on the bodily occupation of space, the bodily re-animation of roles, and the bodily activity of speech. From the point of view of *Thyestes*-in-performance, actors should be considered repeat offenders, even when acting in ignorance of what has gone before. Reception does not have to be a

[37] Baker (1965), 107 & 121-29; Miola (1992), 13-32. Jones (1977), 91-97 identifies Euripides' *Hecuba* as another possible source.
[38] Miola (1992), 40. On classical education as a corrupting influence in *Titus*, see also West (1982). Titus also declares that 'Worse than Philomel you used my daughter / and worse than Progne will I be revenged.' 5.2.195-96.
[39] On "Old Titus": Fuller (1901), and on the 1589 date: Bate (1995), Hughes (2006)
[40] On Peele's conjectural authorship: Baldwin (1959), Bullough (1966), Wilson (1948), Jackson (1996). Jowett (2007) has it 'now attributed to Shakespeare and George Peele'. Norland (2009), 236 on Peele's transition from university to public drama. Schleiner (1990), 30-37 points to the indirect diffusion of classical knowledge among members of the London companies.

conscious act.[41] If we regard agency not as the exclusive property of the author or performer but as belonging to the performance text itself, our perspective shifts. With Seneca's *Thyestes* as a reference point, *Titus* cannot help being a vehicle for its transmission. As embodied knowledge, consumed in the physical learning of lines, in their physical expression, Seneca's *Thyestes* passes through the bodies of successive actors as they lend themselves to these roles, even if they are unaware of this particular ingredient.

Since James Calfhill's neo-Latin *Progne* was staged for the Queen's visit to Oxford in 1566, its performance was recorded in John Bereblock's *Commentarii*. According to this account, it appears to bear significant resemblance to another neo-Latin *Progne* by Italian humanist Gregorio Corraro, printed in 1558. The relationship between the two *Progne*-plays was first raised by Durand in 1905, although he was unable to access a copy of Corraro.[42] The lines of text which Bereblock cites are an Ovidian compilation, and therefore unlikely to be direct quotes from the performance. We therefore possess a detailed description of *Progne* as performance event, but only the ghost of a script behind it. Calfhill's play, like so many neo-Senecan tragedies, commenced with the emergence of a vengeful ancestral ghost from the Underworld:

> *Primo ibi exauditus est strepitus quidam subterraneus, reconditus & formidabilis. Hinc sese infernis e partibus erigit Diomedes. Illud vero tum fuit horribile, spumas agere in ore, caput, pedes, brachia flagrantia habere, non fortuito, sed insito et innato incendio, ipsum vero misere nimis perterreri, ac agitari furiarum taedis ardentibus, ac facinus immane ac nefandum impelli, domo scilicet propria virus acerbitatis suae evomere, ad nepotum thalamus omnia dira canere. Sed*

[41] Hardwick (2011).
[42] Corraro (ed. Casarsa, 1981). Durand (1905).

*Daemonem istum tam tetrum, tam horribilem, tam infestum suis consistere nusquam longius patiuntur, ad inferna iterum maximo luctu laboreque tanquam in pistrinum aliquod, eum furiae detrudunt.*[43]

Durand suggests that this may have been presented as dumbshow, but given that Corraro's text also opens with a prologue delivered by the tormented ghost, there is no reason to suppose that the flaming torches, frothing jaws and frantic movement could not have accompanied such lines as

*Venio coactus. Quis novus cogit furor*
*dirum profari facinus? Agnosco nefas.*
*…*
*Matris furorem cerno et eversam domum*
*miserumque patrem. Video crudelis focos*
*et sparsa pueri viscera et diras dapes.*
*…*
*Ora quis quatit mea?*
*Vocat flagello me ad infernos lacus*
*Erynnis*. (Corraro, *Progne* 35-66)

Diomedes, like a demonic Cassandra, even envisions the Thyestean carnage about to occur. Durand concurs that the presence of Diomedes seems to indicate that Calfhill followed

[43] ['First there was heard a subterranean shriek, hidden and blood-curdling. Then Diomedes reared himself up out of hell. That was truly horrible: he foamed at the mouth and bore flame on his head, his feet, his arms, not just superficially but with an innate, ingrained combustion. He was truly overcome by the most wretched fear, and driven by the burning torches of Furies, compelled into a massive and unspeakable act, he spewed the poison of his bitterness upon his house and predicted all kinds of atrocity for his son's marriage. But they could not suffer that Demon so foul, so dread, so horrifying, to remain for long, and so at last the Furies dragged him, with much grief and struggle, as though to prison, back down to the infernal depths.'] Bereblock (1887), 146.

Corraro quite closely, and although Bereblock's extensive quotations from *Metamorphoses* 6 suggest direct Ovidian sourcing as well, the obvious model for a reluctant *alastor* in a play with such a plot is *Thyestes*' Tantalus. Fitting Bereblock's commentary together with the conjectural text derived from Corraro provides a vivid impression of how such a scene could be represented on the university stage, translating heightened language into a physicality equally distorted by hyper-human passions.

Structurally, Seneca is never far from *Progne*'s surface. It contains diabolical instigation (*Thy*. 1-121 and *Agam*. 1-56), a reported storm at sea (*Agam*. 421-578), a choral ode to Bacchus (*Oed*. 403-508), Progne's debate with her Nutrix (*Med*. 150-75) and the Thyestean banquet (*Thy*. 885-1113). Linguistically, the almost mantric repetitions of *nefas, dira,* and *scelus maius scelere* build up like thunderheads. Progne murders her son in the stable where Diomedes butchered his own victims, a space no less haunted than Seneca's *locus horridus* (*Prog*. 875-82; compare *Thy*. 650-82). She then prepares her 'murderous feast' according to a Thyestean recipe: *pars haec aheno volvitur, aestu laticem / miscente, at illa verubus affixa ingemit* (*Prog*. 938-39); compare both *Thy*. 765-67 and *Met*. 6.645-46. A boiling cauldron and hissing spits occur in all three, but the cloud of oily black smoke that fills the house at *Thy*. 773-75 and *Prog*. 939 is absent from the *Metamorphoses*. Tereus, lolling wreathed and intoxicated, attempts to swallow his swelling sense of doom while Progne gloats like Atreus as she surveys him: *Vide ut superbus regio solio incubet / nec credit ullo posse devinci malo* (971-72; cf. *Thy*. 908-19). Tereus calls for his son, and Progne has Philomena reveal the severed head, along with her own scarred face, asking, *Hunc ne cognoscis, pater, magis an sororem*? (*Prog*. 992-93. In *Thyestes*, Atreus taunts his brother, *Natos ecquid agnoscis tuos*? and Thyestes responds, *Agnosco fratrem* (1005-06). Corraro's action breaks off at an impasse as the rapist refuses to acknowledge his culpability and the revenger her excess. No metamorphosis results, merely an unrepentant stand-off.

It is impossible to place *Progne* with absolute certainty among the sources of *Titus Andronicus,* although if Peele did have a hand in *Titus*' composition it is tempting to conjecture such a relationship. Both *Progne* and *Titus* include a key scene in which the mutilated rape victim appears onstage as visual counterpoint to a verbal description of her injuries. Emaciated, bruised and speechless, Philomena is appropriated by her sister as the mascot of a revenge motivated as much by sexual jealousy as by sororial affection (*Prog*. 566-83). Although its Ovidian plot may have been learnt in the schoolroom,[44] *Titus* turns its lessons to re-*enacting* the drama of Procne/*Progne*. Ovid's poetic artistry becomes scandalous when the 'bubbling fountain stirred with wind' (2.4.22-23) must be appreciated not only in Marcus' voice but in the equally voluble presence of Lavinia's bleeding mouth.[45] The 1594 Quarto text of *Titus* specifies that Lavinia enters in II.iv with *Her handes cut off, and her tongue cut out, and ravisht*. Martin White, discussing twentieth-century approaches to this stage direction, concludes that 'the degree of separation between language and image is crucial' in successfully juxtaposing Marcus' eloquence to the harrowing spectacle before him.[46] An overly stylised Lavinia risks colluding in artistic cover-up; overly literal, and Marcus risks an inhumane callousness. Somehow, the audience must not only tolerate, but throw themselves into the breach between what is spoken aloud and what is made visible.

The mouth as organ of both speech and eating dominates the imagery of both *Progne* and *Titus*, wherein the cannibalistic meal is served as recompense for the severed tongue in the tragic economy of retaliation.[47] As Peter Stallybrass points out, the mouth in Jacobean tragedy can be figured as borderline sublime, exhaling sweet breath and sweeter words, or as thoroughly repellent in its slobbering greed.[48] Even the most refined utterance issues from

[44] Fawcett (1983), 268.
[45] Victims of sexual violence are regularly made to appear visually appealing in the *Met*: Richlin (1992).
[46] White (1998), 194. Dessen (1999) identifies a range of strategies used by twentieth-century directors in dealing with the outrages perpetrated in this play.
[47] On which, see Kerrigan (1996).
[48] Stallybrass (1991), 210-11.

this multipurpose orifice, shared by the supposedly intellectual pursuit of discourse and the inescapably carnal pursuits of sexuality and ingestion. Throats are of particular concern in the corporeal organisation of *Titus Andronicus*, as the swallowing gullet also serves as the channel for corrupt, embodied words. Consider, for example, Titus' reaction to his daughter's mutilation, reminiscent of *Thyestes* 999-1000 and 1041-42:

> My bowels cannot hide her woes,
> But like a drunkard must I vomit them.
> Then give me leave, for losers will have leave
> To ease their stomachs with their bitter tongues. (3.1)

Eating and speaking have a long history of entanglement, even interchangeability,[49] including the recurrent Renaissance image of classical reception - *imitatio* - as digestion; that is, a process of converting something external to the body into the substance of that body itself.[50] The primary ancient source for the metaphor is Seneca's *Epistle* 84,[51] but it is recycled in contexts as diverse as Petrarch's *Familiares*, Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*, and Montaigne's *Essays*.[52] As in *Titus Andronicus*, where the revenge recounted in Ovid's poem provides the recipe for yet another *dira dapes*, classical text may be subsumed by its readers to the extent that reading entails enactment. The process of digestion does not imply disinterested transmission - indeed, Montaigne is scathing towards those scholars who simply pass choice morsels from hand to hand without even tasting, let alone consuming them - but

[49] This is especially prevalent in Roman satire. See Gowers (1993) and Richlin (1989), 26-27 & 69.
[50] Greene (1983), 74 & 147.
[51] *alimenta, quae accepimus, quamdiu in sua qualitate perdurant et solida innatant stomacho, onera sunt; at cum ex eo, quod erant, mutata sunt, tum demum in vires et in sanguinem transeunt. Idem in his, quibus aluntur ingenia, praestemus, ut quaecumque hausimus, non patiamur integra esse, ne aliena sint. Concoquamus illa… Adsentiamur illis fideliter et nostra faciamus, ut unum quiddam fiat ex mutis*. *Ep*. 84.6-7.
[52] Erasmus, *Ciceronianus* (1978), 402; Montaigne, *On Pedantry* (1991), 134; Petrarch, *Familiares* 22.2 (1985), 212-13.

rather an organic synthesis of resources into practical sustenance. In swallowing 'her own increase' (5.2.192), Tamora also takes into her actor's body a portion of Tereus, a sliver of Thyestes, not in their entirety but as ingredients of an intertextual concoction. According to early modern practices of classical reception, delivering lines is equivalent to ingesting their contents. As speech spreads intellectual comprehension of the text throughout the speaker's body, however, its partial disclosures and figured occlusions only increase the participant's hunger for theatrical excess.

Theatre in Education

Grounded in rhetorical training and principles of *imitatio*, the Elizabethan education system did not distinguish between textual study, declamation, speech training and personal development. Grammar schools, following Erasmian guidelines, taught what Knapp calls 'a program of total immersion in the study of ancient languages,' in which memorization and improvisation were just as important as formal grammar.[53] The reading programs set out by Erasmus and Elyot recommend engaging children with the tales of adventure, battles and marvels found in Homer, Caesar, Lucian, encouraging them to emulate both the style and substance of these models.[54] Ideally, Latin and Greek should become internalised. Performance offered a practical complement to a humanist curriculum which stressed the capacity of education not merely to instruct, but to shape and transform the pupil. Nicholas Mann defines humanism as 'an appetite for classical texts; a philological concern to correct them and ascertain their meaning; and a desire to imitate them.'[55] Classroom practice may have failed on occasion to satisfy; Grafton and Jardine conclude that rote-learning and

[53] Knapp (2002), 261. See also Burrow (2004). Erasmus, Ascham and Elyot, along with Mulcaster and Wilson's section on groundwork, were the major educational treatises of the period. See also Kempe, *Method* 223: 'All knowledge is taught generally both by precepts of arte, and also by practice of the same precepts. They are practiced partly by observing examples of them in other men's workes, and partly by making somewhat of our own; and that first by imitation, and at length without imitation.'
[54] Erasmus, *de Rat. Stud*. p669; Elyot, *Governor* [book X].
[55] Mann (1996), 7.

grammatical overload brainwashed generations of 'fluent and docile young noblemen,'[56] but Kenneth Gouwens notes on the other hand the 'personal connectedness' and affection writers such as Machiavelli and Petrarch developed for their classical past.[57] This is supported by Thomas Greene's account of Renaissance *imitatio*, attempts at nostalgic assimilation arising from the sudden perception of an irreparable break with antiquity.[58]

Extracurricular drama encouraged students to apply the principles of rhetorical persuasion through participation in dramatic performances. The instruction in practical oratory received by performers may therefore supply an insight into how such speeches were delivered. Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* suggests how heightened language may have affected the performers' bodies. According to Lawrence Ryan, Quintilian's *Institutio* 'became the chief literary stimulus to many of the educational reforms of Renaissance humanism,'[59] a claim borne out by Erasmus' emphatic recommendation that Quintilian's precepts be assumed as educational guidelines.[60] Thomas Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric*, for instance, published in 1560, follows the basic outline of the *Institutio* (and Cicero's *de Oratore*) in covering the construction of argument, figures of speech, and finally delivery ('Pronunciation'). Wilson spends most of his brief section on the voice listing a satirical catalogue of speech defects, then turns like Quintilian to gesture, defining it as 'a certain comely moderation of the countenance and all other parts of a man's body, aptly agreeing to those things which are spoken.'[61] Gesture augments the speaker's verbal persuasiveness with the spectacle of 'the whole body stirring together.' Although reducing the *Institutio*'s coverage, Wilson nevertheless retains Quintilian's principle of using the body to support the voice.

[56] Grafton & Jardine (1986), 24.
[57] 'Study of the classics was not just a mechanical approach to texts but was instead an activity laden with affect and even potentially transformative.' Gouwens (1998), 81.
[58] Greene (1982).
[59] Ryan (1967), 25-26.
[60] Erasmus, *de Ratione Studii* p681; see also *de Copia*, e.g. p297 and *Ciceronianus* p403-04.
[61] Wilson (1994), 243.

Roger Ascham likewise follows Quintilian in his pedagogical treatise *The Schoolmaster*, but although he proposes to lay out a full system of rhetorical training including *declamatio*, the manuscript is incomplete or unfinished.[62] Further diffusion of Quintilian's advice on physicality through Renaissance letters is evident in Castiglione's 1561 *Book of the Courtier*, a manual of manners which informed the *habitus* of sixteenth-century European elites. Castaglione's prescriptions for movement, argues Rebhorn, are largely derived from 'the section of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* devoted to *actio*, or delivery… Castaglione's theory of courtliness can be read as a transposition of ancient rhetorical teaching according to which the courtier is always engaged in practising a species of epideictic oratory.'[63] The most important premise adapted from Quintilian is that motion should be consonant with spoken discourse. Polished posturing in the Italian court otherwise has little in common with amateur dramatics in the homespun classroom, but the effort to reconcile language with the body that must bear it - to suit the action to the word - is of professional concern to princes, orators, actors and scholars alike.

Despite their family resemblance, Quintilian takes pains to distinguish acting from oratory. Oratory requires less illustrative movement: *actione enim constat, non imitatione* (*Inst*. 11.3.183). In other words, the orator's objective is not to represent a situation by replaying it mimetically, but to alter the emotional state of the listeners in such a way that they will take appropriate action. Oratory may be a less histrionic medium, but this should in no way imply that it is any less theatrical. Its motives are, in the strictest sense, aesthetic: designed, that is, to stimulate sensation in the audience. Although according to Cicero's Antonius (*de Orat.* 2. 189), the audience can most effectively be moved if the corresponding emotions *in ipso oratore impressi esse atque inusti videbuntur*, Crassus remarks later in the same dialogue that displays of real emotion (*animi permotio*) tend to produce mixed signals

[62] Ryan (1967), 22.
[63] Rebhorn (1993), 251.

that are difficult to interpret; instead, the orator should concentrate on integrating vocal, facial, physical and gestural qualities into the appearance of a readily identifiable essence (*de Orat.* 3.215-16). Quintilian specifies the correct set of the head, neck, expression (*vultus*) and eyes, including eyelids and eyebrows (*Inst.* 11.3.71-83). Persuasion occurs not simply as a result of reasoned argument, rhetorical ornament and *coups de théâtre* like Aquilius' scars (*de Orat.* 2.195-96), but - as Cicero and Quintilian both assert - delivery is of primary, secondary and tertiary importance in determining the efficacy of a speech.[64]

Oratory engages the whole body. *Adfectus omnes languescant necesse est, nisi voce, vultu, totius prope habitu corporis inardescunt*, writes Quintilian (*Inst.* 11.3.2-3), and proceeds to anatomise the process. He also recommends an exercise regimen that will produce the *firmitas corporis* necessary for adequate vocal support. A voice grounded in toned muscularity acquires greater capacity and flexibility than one which is unsupported and therefore liable to strain. Voice also carries and communicates emotion. Like Cicero, Quintilian recognises the inadequacy of breaking into an outburst of uncontrolled *adfectus*, which needs to be shaped (*formandi*) by discipline and method (11.3.61). An orator is not required to experience genuinely the emotions he has to convey; this degree of immersion may even be detrimental to a persuasive performance. The voice functions as a medium, so that whatever attitude is taken on by the orator will be transmitted and implanted in the minds of his audience (*sic velut media vox, quem, habitum a nostris acceperit, hunc iudicum animis dabit, Inst.* 11.3.62).

A voice protean in its intonations and supported by disciplined breath also benefits from appropriate gestural accompaniment, *qui et ipse voci consentit et animo cum ea simul parat* (11.3.65). This should originate not in the words themselves (producing literal illustrations of, say, whipping or Verrine debauchery); instead, *sit gestus ad sensus magis*

[64] *Actio, de Orat.* 3.213; *pronuntiatio, Inst.* 11.3.6.

*quam ad verba accommodatus* (11.3.89). Direct *imitatio* (11.3.88) should be avoided, but Quintilian is nevertheless acutely aware of the orator's body as a persuasive instrument, from the set of the head to the position of the feet, and from the extensive vocabulary of hand movements to the inclinations of the torso that follow through each utterance.[65] The spine, the neck, the knees are committed to producing rhetorical affect. Quintilian regards enthusiasm as no substitute for expressiveness, because it is not the orator but his audience who should find themselves caught up and carried away.

Nowhere is the overlap between pedagogy, practical oratory, and extracurricular drama more evident than in the career of impresario Richard Mulcaster. Head of Westminster School and then of St Paul's from 1596, Mulcaster produced the manual *Positions Concerning the Training Up of Children*, which recommends intensive vocal training for young people as a form of physical exercise. Alongside intellectual engagement with language, he advises that the body's overall fitness can be improved by controlled breathing, crying and laughing, singing, reading and speaking aloud, skills which are coincidentally indispensible to disciplined acting. Such a training program, Gina Bloom suggests, may well have been associated with his role as theatrical producer.[66] Mulcaster's involvement with court entertainment began when Elizabeth I attended the Westminster Latin play in 1566, but subsequent high-profile productions staged by his troupe included Marston's *Sophonisba* (c.1605) and *Antonio's Revenge* (1599), and Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois* (?1604). To what extent this repertoire constituted an edifying experience for its adolescent casts as well as a fashionable diversion for Elizabeth's court may be somewhat debatable. The plays are, however, rich in opportunities for the kind of embodied vocality recommended by Mulcaster as part of a well-rounded education, and display marked senecan characteristics.

[65] *Latera cum gestu consentiant*, Quintilian observes (11.3.122. *Facit enim aliquid et totius corporis motus, adeo ut Cicero plus illo agi quam manibus ipsis putet*.
[66] Bloom (2007), 29-32; see further Shapiro (2002), 316-21. Compare Elyot's exercise program in *The Governor*, which is more concerned with sports such as hunting and archery.

Both the boys of St Paul's and the Chapel Children at Blackfriars performed in indoor venues much like those of the university colleges and Inns of Court, structurally based on the layout of the aristocratic Great Hall. The stage was constructed at one end of a rectangular room, with seating close on three sides and a gallery above. Ostentatious spectators could pay for a stool on the stage itself, further reducing the playing area to a few square metres. Despite special effects such as apparitions, this was not a theatre of action so much as a tableau overlaid with rhetorical discourse. Drilled in the principles of classical *elocutio*, Mulcaster's ensemble impressed with their virtuosity. Rather than drawing the audience into a seamless fictional scenario, they emphasised their artifice, repeatedly breaking the illusion in order to draw attention to their skill in sustaining it.[67] The very fact that these were pubescent and pre-pubescent boys playing adult roles was a discrepancy not to be ignored, but rather to be celebrated. Once again, the disjunction between the body of the performer and the words he uttered was central to the dramatic experience.

The elite children's companies at St Paul's and Blackfriars served commercial interests. Nevertheless, even at its most sophisticated, the tradition still maintained its connection with academic practice, while grammar and choir schools with less entrepreneurial masters continued to use extracurricular drama as a training ground for practical rhetoric.[68] Anecdotal evidence from Digby's *Two Treatises* (1645) testifies to the use of Seneca in education, and moreover, in a performative context. Although the *Treatises* come from a somewhat later period, it is certainly more likely that they refer to practices springing from the Jacobethan enthusiasm for Seneca rather than from interregnal austerity.[69] Digby describes a blind schoolmaster who, 'when he taught his schollers to declaim… or to represent some of Seneca's Tragedies, or the like, he would by their voice know their gesture,

[67] Shapiro (1977), 103-08.
[68] Gurr (2009), 114: 'The growth of commercial interests made the acting tail wag the educational dog but the link between the two was not entirely severed.'
[69] Cornwallis' 1601 *Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian* uses eleven sententiae as the departure for moral meditations. See Miola (1992), 5.

and the situation they putt their bodies in; so that he would be able, as soone as they spoke, to judge whether they stood or sate, or in what posture they were.'[70] The credibility of this claim is less important than the preconditions it assumes. Digby cites Seneca as a standard or indeed a model text for classroom enactment and also attests to a perceived inseparability of body from voice.

In Europe, meanwhile, the pedagogical value of enactment had also been recognised and incorporated into contemporary Jesuit education. Jesuit schools regularly mounted lavish pageants designed to involve the local community. Spectacular costumes, ornate settings and exotic props were combined with heightened discourse to induce in the audience an overpowering sense of wonder.[71] While enabling pupils to develop their skills in Latin and public speaking in a context conducive to active engagement in learning, the productions also functioned as exercises in recruitment, fundraising and public relations.[72] All plays performed in Jesuit schools appear to have been composed by scholar-playwrights within the order, exhibiting formal adherence to classical models like Seneca within Biblical or hagiographic plots.[73] Senecan features deployed to signal generic affiliation with high tragedy include the supernatural prologue, the doomed megalomaniac, the structural alternation of monologues with choral odes, allusions to the Classical pantheon, verbally externalised emotional states, and long strings of pleonasm applied in particular to evil or corruption. Venegas' *Achabus*, for instance, brings on the Devil himself to deliver the prologue in heavy-handed senecan terms:

*Et nunc, daturus pestem in omnes maximam*

*patente tamquam mortifer hiatu vapor,*

[70] Quoted in Bloom (2007), 101.
[71] Griffin (1976), 40; 49; 232-33
[72] Griffin (1976), 14-17, 26.
[73] Seneca was employed *comme d'un dictionnaire d'images*. Chevalier (2010), 217.

*advenio: tellus sensit adventum meum;*

*labefacta gravis pallet, alget, aestuat* (30-33).[74]

The style of acting was stylised rather than naturalistic. Griffin argues that 'Good orators are, then, good actors, and the emphasis is on the grace [*venustas*], charm [*lepor*] and poise [*decorum*] of their performances rather than upon any notion of verisimilitude or characterisation.'[75] It was not mimetic accuracy which 'suffused everyone with incredible bliss' and transported the soul to grace.[76] Rather, as Quintilian advises, (11.3.183), stylized and codified gestures contain and command more sensation than the idiosyncratic movements associated with naturalism.

Michael Shapiro, in his study of the function and repertoire of Elizabethan children's companies, identifies three styles of acting based on stylistic variation in the texts; two of these, the "natural" and the "parodic", are of less concern here than Shapiro's third style, the "declamatory", which

> stresses rhetorical and poetic effects, and deemphasizes the idiosyncracies of speech and gesture that individualize particular characters. The mode of delivery probably resembled that used by trained orators, and emphasised poise, elocution, vocal inflection and modulation, and graceful use of gesture.[77]

Shapiro compares this presentational relationship to the text with that of an opera singer, who is not required to convey character or motive so much as emotion and sensation. However, he

[74] Quoted in Griffin (1976), 130-31.
[75] Griffin (1976), 91.
[76] Quoted in Griffin (1976), 232-33: '*Omnes incredibili voluptate perfusi sunt… Denique fuit tota haec actio iucundissima et ad animi pietatem non mediocrem incitamentum*.' From correspondence, 1559. Chevalier (2010), 27 observes that *La musicalité des mètres latins, en effet, comme la musique des oratorios, ne charme les âmes que pour mieux les convertir*.
[77] Shapiro (1977), 116.

goes on to propose that diminished verisimilitude 'affords the audience an extra degree of detachment from the action.'[78] This does not necessarily follow. Rhetorical speech skillfully delivered, according to Renaissance commentators, has just as much capacity to move its audience as a piece of well-observed mimesis.[79] According to Vickers,

> we encounter the idea almost universal throughout the Renaissance, that rhetoric cannot be resisted… The elevation of the act of persuasion to the highest point of human power is astonishing to a modern reader, perhaps, but it is one that the Renaissance rhetorician meant seriously.[80]

Speech, rather than writing, was the default medium of rhetorical persuasion. As Vickers shows, Renaissance theory extolled the effect of an orator upon his audience. As a consequence, however, there has been little attention paid to the concurrent effects of learning - that is, internalising - the science of rhetorical *actio*.

Following these principles, then, Mulcaster's secular version of pedagogical *actio* was played out by the St Paul's ensemble. The contribution of Seneca to the theatre of the boy companies is illustrated particularly well by Marston's semi-parody *Antonio's Revenge* (c. 1600). Thick with allusions to *Hamlet*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Thyestes*, *Antonio* treads a fine and deadly line between consummate commitment to a rhetorical aesthetic and ruthlessly sending up its own verbal craftsmanship. Self-consciousness about linguistic expression, as Elizabeth Yearling argues, need not entail mockery. Rather, Marston appears to be responding to 'the stylistic quandary created for tragedians by contemporary attitudes to rhetoric' that rejected effusive, overly formal

[78] Shapiro (1977), 136
[79] Wilson (1560) [1994] explains in his preface how rhetoric tamed and civilized prehistoric man. For further examples and discussion, see Vickers (1983).
[80] Vickers (1983, 418.

declamation of the passions.[81] Such self-consciousness is also well-suited to juvenile performers whose appeal stemmed precisely from the audience's awareness of the discrepancy or gap between actor and role, when eloquent and violent or carnal words were delivered in an immature, immaculate voice.

*Antonio* makes pointed use of Senecan tags.[82] Its most prominent intertext is with *Thyestes*, as Antonio avenges his father by killing the murderer's son and serving him up at a banquet. As in *Titus*, however, this horror becomes somewhat overshadowed as the corpses pile up in the final act. Nevertheless, *Antonio's Revenge* contains the longest direct quotation from Seneca spoken on the English Renaissance stage:

> O quisquis nova
> supplicia functis durus umbrarum arbiter
> disponis, quisquis exeso iaces
> pavidus sub antro, quisquis venturi times
> montis ruinam, quisquis avidorum feros,
> rictus leonum, et dira furiarum agmina
> implicatus horres, Antonii vocem excipe
> Properantis ad vos: Ulciscar (3.2.15-22; cf. *Thy*. 13-15, 75-81).

This extract from the prologue of *Thyestes* is spoken by Antonio himself, who has just been visited by his father's ghost and commanded to exact revenge. Initially unable to speak, when he finally does respond to his mother's frantic questioning, it is with a mouthful of Senecan Latin. It is at once an eerie and a show-stopping moment, in which issues of identity, authorship, authority and authenticity converge. The young actor's declamatory facility

[81] Yearling (1980), 269.
[82] 2.3.4-5; 2.4.21; 2.5.50; 3.1.51; 3.3.7-8; 5.1.1-2.

comes to the surface, but at the same time "Antonio" has fallen into glossolalia and lost his own linguistically constructed self. In a very real way, Seneca's Tantalus is speaking through him, unmediated, untranslated, and yet assimilated to a very different situation; the words are not rearranged, but they are cut down and interrupted by the possessive 'Antonii'. Quite who is in possession and what is possessed in this episode is less than clear. It appears to be a prime instance of Senecan text taken up as impetus for action, teaching the ideology of vengeance as it takes over the young avenger, and as such a reminder of the dangers as well as the pleasure and utility of lending one's body to ancient words.

Both the supporters and detractors of Renaissance theatre recognised its affective charge. 'Adversaries of the stage,' Jonas Barish observes, 'never doubted its hold over its audiences; they simply considered that hold a malignant one.'[83] Barish plots manifestations of 'antitheatrical prejudice' from antiquity to the twentieth century in order to determine the factor common to anti-mimetic viewpoints. He concludes that they derive from a fundamental objection to hybridity, mutability and in particular to the loss of a singular self, which is inherent in the principle of performative representation.[84] Antitheatrical objections also seem to reflect the extent to which this body appears not as the outward expression of an independent subjectivity (or soul) but as substance pressed into the service of external forces: text, mask, persona, music, choreography, simulated passion, or pain. Walker discusses the kind of problems that arise when 'the realm of ideas becomes actualized through dramatic performance':

[83] Barish (1981) 118.
[84] Webb (2008), esp 157-65, addressing the Church Fathers' antipathy towards pantomime in late antiquity, has identified similar trends: the dancer's uncanny ability to submerge his own physical identity in a polymorphous multitude threatened an ideology based on unity, stability and self-control.

> While the actor manipulated his role through performance, he was also understood to be manipulated by it… Dramatic performance was itself a mode of learning, [but] one that possessed an unsettling power to fashion individuals in its own image.[85]

The comparison of a receptive subject to wax ready to take an imprint appears regularly in Renaissance educational theory: William Kempe in his *Method of Schooling* and Roger Ascham in *The Schoolmaster* both use this image.[86] The impression is psychological, but also corporeal: Quintilianic oratory pares physicality down to a neutrality uncluttered by personal *habitus*, an infinite malleability in which your body - stripped of the quirks and tics and rhythmic patterns and postural deficiencies acquired from a lifetime of repetitive movement - is no longer your own.[87]

The very qualities that enabled drama to instill humanist principles also made the medium itself dangerously volatile. Anti-theatrical polemicist (and sometime playwright) Stephen Gosson contends that even plays with sound moral messages 'may be read with profite, but cannot be played' without endangering the integrity of the performers; in putting on 'the gate [*sic*], the gestures, the voice, the passions' of women and tyrants, actors not only compromise their own identity but risk permanent transformation.[88] As William Prynne asserted in one of the most vicious contemporary attacks on theatre,

> Stage-plays may be privately read without any danger of infection… When a man reads a play, he ever wants that *viva vox*, that flexanimous rhetoricall Stage-elocution,

[85] Walker (2008), 5.
[86] Kempe 219: '[that] Softe Waxe will receive any print, that young plants may be bowed any way, that the bodies of infants may fashioned as ye list.' Ascham, (1570) [1967] 34: 'For the pure clean wit of a sweet young babe is, like the newest wax, most able to receive the best and fairest printing.' Compare Quint. *Inst.* 10.5.9, who uses the same image to describe the malleability of sentence arrangement: thoughts may be paraphrased *velut eadem cera aliae aliaeque formae duci solent.*
[87] Compare Grotowski (1968), 103-06, 185.
[88] Gosson (1582), *actio* 3.

> that lively action and representation of the Players themselves which put life and vigor into these their Enterludes, and make them pierce more deeply into the Spectator's eyes, their ears and lewde affectations.[89]

Endeavouring to achieve 'flexanimous rhetoricall elocution' was one of the major goals of Elizabethan education. Here, as in Seneca's (and indeed Cicero's) Rome, drama and oratory converge. If indoctrination into virtuous humanist-Christian values was Mulcaster's objective, plays like *Antonio's Revenge* rather miss the mark. If, however, the point was to encourage a 'flexanimous' use of language and a state of mind (and body) receptive to its effects, such sensationalism appears less gratuitous. Principles imparted by the text could be easily impressed upon the bodies and memories of juvenile performers. Variations on Senecan tragedy were performed in a pedagogical context precisely because of their capacity to captivate and enthrall.

Conclusion

The consequences of playing Seneca could, as Case and Gager would maintain, be entirely beneficial. As a means of self-fashioning, they enabled participants to internalize both the qualities of Latin verse and a gestural vocabulary appropriate to delivering rhetoric in one of its densest forms. On the other hand, according to the views of Rainolds and Prynne, the dangers inherent in exposure to stagecraft outweighed its advantages. Corruption as well as improvement could result from pursuing conformity to ancient models. *Titus Andronicus*, for example, might be interpreted as a perverted version of *imitatio* in which the impulse to surpass the master-text inspires both villains and revengers to commit greater and greater

[89] Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix* [part 2] (1633), 930-31. Barish (1981), 87 calls Prynne's treatise 'an exercise in pathology'.

atrocities.[90] Anxieties about enactment reflect a principle integral to the senecan aesthetic which is operational throughout neo-Latin drama. In rhetorical training, as well as in theatrical performance, the body becomes an instrument, an object to be held at arm's length and manipulated; it ceases to be an integrated part of the unselfconscious subject, or an index of his "proper" self. Rhetorical training not only improves the body's ability to deceive, but caters to its willingness – or rather, its indiscriminate, promiscuous desire – to be transformed.

[90] West (1982).

## Chapter 3

## SENECA GOES PUBLIC

While neo-Latin drama continued to fulfil its educational role, Seneca also began to enter the commercial theatre in translation. Translation in this context involved changing more than language or idiom;[1] alterations in theatre architecture, actor-audience relationships, conditions of delivery, scenic resources and representational conventions entailed corresponding shifts in how Seneca could be realised in performance. The late sixteenth century was not only Seneca's most prolific period in terms of stage presentation, but also the point at which the senecan aesthetic itself became fully formed. By distilling those features in Senecan drama congenial to contemporary theatrical practice and popular taste, sixteenth-century translators and playwrights (and actors, such as Marlovian hero Edward Alleyn) unintentionally created a composite redefinition of their Latin resource.

Seneca's transition into French and English vernacular theatre moved along two different but roughly concurrent courses. French humanist translators Jean de la Péruse and Robert Garnier retained and exaggerated elements of Seneca's style, which were incorporated into the professional theatre in works such as Alexandre Hardy's *Mariamne*. Exaggeration was also the *modus operandi* of the first English translations of Seneca, collected in 1581 as the *Tenne Tragedies*, whose aggrandizement of their model made an evident impression on Revels plays at the Inns of Court and on early playhouse tragedies such as *Tamburlaine* and *Locrine*. A chiastic pattern then emerges: while English theatre imported senecan tropes into unrelated plots, French tragedies of the 1620s and 1630s such as Rotrou's *Hercule Mourant* and Corneille's *Médée* retained Seneca's plots but updated them into a 'baroque' mode. Juxtaposing the two narratives, English and French, of Seneca's transmission into the

[1] On the theory of translating ancient theatre, see Hardwick (2010) and Walton (2006). On theatrical translation more generally, see Pavis (1989).

vernacular demonstrates the diversity of adaptive methods during this formative period, and illustrates the difference between Seneca in translation and the senecan aesthetic in performance.

French Humanist tragedy: *sang et nouriture* [2]

Senecan tragedy appeared regularly in French translation throughout the sixteenth century. It also pervaded the style of works such as Jodelle's historical drama *Cléopâtre Captive* (1553) and Jean de la Taille's Biblical *Saul le Furieux* (1572) to such an extent that Griffiths describes source-hunting as 'meaningless in the sixteenth-century context… Much of the imagery which is used by poets of the time must in fact flow from a subconscious stream of literary memory - truly converted *en sang et nouriture*.'[3] Jondorf identifies the following 'Senecan' attributes of sixteenth-century French tragedy:

> the rhetorical use of language; the stress on an external Fate… the doom-laden atmosphere and the use of supernatural elements such as ghosts, Furies or visions… On the one hand the characters tend to be types, and on the other, their speeches are often set-pieces embodying a clearly defined and recognizable theme or mood, so that the nearest we come to delineation of character is the presentation of a series of moods.[4]

Characters represented monochromatic emotional extremes, rather than individual psychologies, suggesting an affective rather than an imitative theatre. According to Griffiths,

[2] The phrase *sang et nouriture* is taken from du Bellay's 1549 *Deffence et illustration de la lange francoyse* (1948), 98: *[Les Romains] immitant les meilleurs aucteurs grecz, se transformant en eux, les devorant, et, apres les avoir bien digerez, les convertissant en sang et nouriture*.
[3] Griffiths (1970), 60. See also Boyle (1997), 142-43 for general comment on the period's use of Senecan imagery, rhetoric and structure.
[4] Jondorf (1969), 14-15.

French Renaissance tragedy modelled itself on Seneca because of his dense language and showpiece rhetoric.[5] Sustained immersion in an emotional state accessed through expressive discourse constituted the experience of a theatre in which 'normal dramatic progression, the realism of dramatic scenes, is sacrificed for an almost operatic technique of solo arias.'[6]

Seneca reached the French stage via a popularisation of ancient theatre that began in the classroom and gained momentum as adaptors seized on his verbal dynamism and macabre content. Initially, humanist tragedy was restricted to the court and the *collèges*, which - like Elizabethan schools and universities of the same period - used drama as a pedagogical tool and Seneca as their principal resource.[7] The first French language tragedy *à la mode antique* to be presented as court entertainment was Étienne Jodelle's *Cléopâtre Captive*, performed in 1553 at the Hôtel de Reims to an aristocratic audience including the king. Encouraged by the example of the Pléiade, humanist circles centred mainly on provincial or Parisian *collèges* began to produce and stage dramatic poetry in the new (antique) style. At first, playwrights and performers remained strictly amateur, their audiences an elite minority, but before long, the fashion spread to existing companies of professional strolling players who gradually added comedies and tragedies to their popular repertoire of farces and morality-plays.[8] Although the majority of these companies left few records, it is known for example that the troupe d'Adrien Talmy, which around the turn of the century was alternating provincial tours with seasons in Paris, performed not only the work of contemporary playwright Alexandre Hardy but revivals of Robert Garnier's *Hippolyte*, *Troas* and *Juives*.[9]

It is clear that Hardy and Garnier composed their scripts as working performance texts rather than exercises in dramatic poetry,[10] but scant evidence remains to verify the conditions

[5] Griffiths (1970), 31.
[6] Griffiths (1970), 35. A similar phenomenon is noted by Barrault (1946), 21-23 in relation to directing Racine.
[7] Mazouer (2002), 146-54.
[8] Mazouer (2002), 20-23.
[9] Mazouer (2002), 190.
[10] Jondorf (1969), 15; Mazouer (2002), 177; Ribemont (2003), 108. First argued by Lebegue (1951).

of performance. Theatre was a transient phenomenon. Travelling players were constrained to set themselves up in "found" spaces, which could be communal (such as fairgrounds, inns or ball-courts) or more private (such as the courtyard or hall of a château).[11] Sets were therefore limited, the stage cramped and bare.[12] In the virtual absence of visual aids such as costumes, props, scenery and effects, performers relied on language to temporarily endow a common space with fictional significance. Like Elizabethan playhouses, the venues used for early modern French tragedy required considerable cooperation from audiences to reconcile visual minimalism with aural overload; unlike playhouses, however, these venues were not purpose-built, and throughout the performance ran the risk of reverting to more mundane uses. Raw rhetoric commanded the attention of audiences otherwise occupied in drinking and jostling and bantering among themselves. This was not the well-mannered Opéra, nor even the convention-bound Comédie of a few decades later. Seneca stomped and roared on a tavern bench or demountable scaffold, spurred by the turbulence of the surrounding crowd to further excesses of blood and braggadocio.

The earliest French vernacular tragedy to claim a Senecan plot, Jean de la Péruse's 1553 *Médée*, was composed for amateur (coterie) theatrical performance but later appears to have entered the professional (touring) repertoire.[13] La Péruse's text is a steady translation of Seneca's, with the addition of Euripides' messenger-speech and the children's tutor. In tags alone, Seneca's contributions outnumber those derived from George Buchanan's Euripides at more than three to one.[14] The play commences with Médée's incensed invocation of chthonic gods and the Nurse's attempt to calm her, including the advice that dissembling her pain will produce better vengeance (59-66). La Péruse retains the choral ode on Argonautic temerity

[11] Mazouer (2002), 190-91. See also Lough (1979); Mittmann (1984).
[12] Mazouer (2002); Ribemont (2003). Also Deierkauf-Holsboer (1960), 46 and Biet (forthcoming).
[13] Coleman (1985), xvi-svii. There is no definite record of a 1553 production, but the first record of a performance is of an outdoor production in 1572 which included memorable special effects: '*feux artificiels et autres singularités*.'
[14] Coleman (1985), 36-53.

that gives Seneca's treatment its thematic unity, as well as the ode assimilating Medea's rage to elemental forces. Médée defends herself, as in Seneca, by attributing to Jason the benefit and thus the blame for her crimes (*Par moi Pélie est mort mais Jason est coupable*, 645). She asserts that *c'est que par moi Argon est reflotté en Grèce* (678), an argument which Euripides' Medea does not stress. After Créon leaves, Médée urges herself on to surpass her former crimes: *Sus donc, Médée, sus, reprends tous les esprits* (747) and *C'est trop peu que cela, ce sont faits de pucelle* (761). This is followed by the exchange in which the Nourrice describes Médée's alternation of tears, menace and glittering eyes, and Médée swears not to give up until *tout l'univers son ordre changera* (825). Her children are killed onstage.

*Médée*'s last word is not, as in Seneca, the absence of gods. In accordance with how this period understood its Senecan resources, it is the endurance of revenge (*venger*, 1205). The whole play, however, could be regarded as an invocation, an address to an oblivious divinity. The apostrophes Médée directs at disloyalty (*ô grand' déloyanté*!, 249), duplicitous speech (*O langue mentreresse*!, 250), or her failed marriage (*ô maudite hyménée*!, 251) juxtapose the open, non-verbal howl of rage (*ô*) with glosses that determine its tone. Her address to the elements as she exhorts them to avenge her contains no less than fourteen *ô*'s in the space of four lines:

> O Terre, ô mer, ô ciel, ô foudres pleins d'encombres
> O déesses, ô dieux, ô infernales ombres,
> O lune, ô jour, ô nuit, ô fantômes volantes,
> O démons, ô esprits, ô chiens d'enfer hurlants,
> venez, courez, volez…(469-72).[15]

[15] ['O Earth, o sea, o sky, o lightning full of wrath, / O goddesses, o gods, o infernal shades, / O moon, o day, o night, o flying phantoms, / O demons, o spirits, o howling hounds of Hell, / Come, hurry, fly!'] Smith (1999), 45 comments that 'the primal [o:] represents a naked, spontaneous *Gestalt* of force, a projection of the crier's body into the world.'

Médée's animated universe swarms with personifications. Gods, demons, ghosts and hell-hounds are summoned onto the stage and into being by the invocation itself. Confronting Jason, she orders him to place their Colchian exploits before his eyes (*devant tes yeux*, 881). Like the audience, Jason relives these adventures under the enargetic spell of Médée's discourse. After his departure, Médée casts her spell, calling Avernus again to the stage: *Là je t'invoquerai sous l'horreur taciturne* (932). Médée herself then experiences a senecan vision of her murdered brother inciting her to revenge, accompanied by the Furies brandishing black torches. Once again, non-verbal exclamation takes over at the climax: *Quel serpent est ici? quelle horrible Mégère? / Quelle ombre démembrée? Ha ha ha, c'est mon frère* (1166-67). In the printed text, Médée's *Ha ha ha* passes before the reader's eyes with mechanical rapidity, but in performance this sudden outburst challenges the actor to express her recognition in nothing but three breaths. Voiced or unvoiced? Mad cackle? Terrified gasps? Attempts to speak? Wild cries? Each "ha" would seem to demand a separate exhalation, but the emotion which expels them requires bodily authentication, and cannot be recovered from the text.

Foremost among the generation of playwrights after La Péruse, Robert Garnier translated Seneca's *Phaedra* as *Hippolyte* in 1573,[16] followed by *La Troade* (1579) and *Antigone* (1580) both of which have more in common with Seneca than either Euripides or Sophocles. *Hippolyte* opens with the ghost of Égée rising from Hades, lamenting *le destin, ce méchant destin* (21) that awaits his cursed descendants. He recounts Thésée's quest to hunt the Minotaur in its 'Daedalean den' (32-34), a subterranean prison equivalent to the Underworld where Thésée himself is now imprisoned. Instead of vengeance, it is simply Fate that will destroy his house: *Le sort est tel*, reflects the shade, lugubriously. *L'inexorable sort* (137). De Mourges notes the proximity of the Underworld to Garnier's characters: *Il semble*

[16] de Mourges (1968), 191 shows how it is more than just a paraphrase, however, and argues that the Garnier's modifications have produced *une brilliante adaptation lyrique*.

*être sous leurs pieds, toujours béant, toujours prêt non seulement à vomir des fantômes ou des monstres mais à engloutir les personnages*.[17] The onstage suicides of both Phèdre and the Nourrice are preceded by visions of Furies and sensations of being burned alive and devoured (1890ff, 2250ff). Torments imported from elsewhere in the Senecan corpus are given a Christian spin, punishing their victims for perjury and lust, and increase *Hippolyte*'s potential to stimulate horror. Unlike contemporary English translator Studley, however, who dwells on the episode at length, Garnier does not reassemble Hippolyte's corpse, employing a visceral vocabulary in place of visual shocks. The heat of Phèdre's desire, for example, 'desiccates her bones' (1400), or boils like sulphur in her veins (1065), or strikes her like an arrow through the lungs (*poumons*, 1003). Bodies revolt against their occupants. Garnier imprisons his audience in a world without refuge, haunted by the perpetual immanence of Hades.

Garnier's *Antigone* is one of the few staged versions in history of Seneca's incomplete *Phoenissae*.[18] Carla Federici shows how Garnier incorporates Greek material when it will 'augment his atrocities' (*pour grosser les atrocités*).[19] In *La Troade*, for example, his Hécube resembles a Medea or Atreus far more than her Euripidean counterpart, calling with ever-increasing vehemence for the revenge which she finally takes on Polymeste. According to Federici, what Seneca brought to Garnier's drama was *une horreur macabre qui teint de rouge-sang l'oeuvre entier, un réalisme cru, brutal, répugnant*.[20] Federici elsewhere terms this nightmare understanding of the world *réalisme sénéquien*.[21] This 'realism', far from showing the surfaces of human(e) interaction, strips them away to expose the crude matter beneath. Responding to a social consciousness poisoned by civil war and collective guilt,

[17] ['It seems to be under their feet, always gaping, always ready not only to vomit out phantoms or monsters but to swallow up the characters themselves.'] de Mourges, 195. On Égée specifically, see also comment by Millet (1995), 175.
[18] On traces of the *Phoenissae*'s final act in Racine's *Thebaïde*, see Tobin (1971), 80-82; Delcroix (1991), 176-77.
[19] Federici (1974), 58.
[20] ['a macabre horror which stains his whole oeuvre blood-red, a realism raw, brutal and repugnant.'] Federici (1974), 20
[21] Federici (1974), 13

Garnier found an atmosphere congenial to his work in *le pathos noir des pièces sénéquinnes, où l'homme impuissant est acculé sans répit vers un dénouement atroce qui le broie*.[22] T.J. Reiss concurs, arguing that the 'reality' fashioned by sixteenth-century staging practices was one which embroiled the audience along with the performers, but does not mention that its primary strategy of verbal ensnarement is inescapably senecan.

Garnier represents the last generation of gentleman-humanists, combining a career in public life with the composition of tragic poetry.[23] In contrast, the first decades of the seventeenth century belonged to the professionals, and were dominated by the considerable output of popular playwright Alexandre Hardy. In describing the effects of Hardy's style, Reiss draws on the recurring figure of the labyrinth, quoting a number of instances in which Hardy uses it to represent the fatalistic universe restricting the movements of his characters.[24] Hardy's language, according to Reiss, presents a snarl of blind alleys, channels of thought and utterance which seem to offer a choice of routes but in fact all lead to a predetermined destination.[25] The audience of Hardy's theatre had little interest in identifying with distinct personalities but rather allowed themselves to identify with the doom approaching each speaker alike. A theatre like Hardy's, in Reiss's view,

> cannot reach the spectator only by making him feel the emotion of certain characters: rather, he must be made to feel an atmosphere… It would be impossible to hold the attention of the spectators long enough for them to identify with a character as they

[22] Federici (1974), 20. On the socio-political background to Garnier's treatment of the supernatural, see also Millet (1995).
[23] For Garnier's biography, see Jondorf (1990), 157.
[24] Reiss (1971), 51-52 e.g. '*oncques de labyrinthe, ouvrage Dédalique, / n'eut une obscurité de détours plus oblique*.' *Scedase*, IV.949-50 (p31); and '*Entre l'obscurité de ce Dédale ombreux / entre le souvenir de nos maux encombreux*…' *Didon Se Sacrifant* (p51-52).
[25] Reiss (1971), 31.

might at a Racinian play. A different kind of theatre was indicated: one that would engulf its audience in the atmosphere created on the stage.[26]

The endless speeches, the sombre and twisted language, the hauntings and harrowings, the constant foreknowledge of events that are duly reported: this is the theatre fashioned by Hardy from senecan material.

Hardy's *Mariamne* works senecan tropes into a sensational quasi-Biblical plot. Performed somewhere between 1615 and 1625, it commences with the ghost of Mariamne's brother Aristobolus, murdered by Hérode when he seized the throne, predicting the tyrant's doom. Hérode then appears in conversation with a *satelles*, boasting of his 'Herculean' deeds and despotic control over the many-headed 'Hydra' of his populace (257-58). Although otherwise *indomptable* (83), he has succumbed to passion for his captive, Mariamne; this motif of Herculean *servitium amoris* would later become central to Rotrou's adaptation of *Hercules Oetaeus*. Unable to account for Hardy's prolific use of classical imagery, Lockert asserts that 'Hardy errs grotesquely in placing in the mouths of the characters of his *Mariamne* continual allusions to classical myth and legend… never to anything Jewish.'[27] On the contrary, the classical allusions clearly graft *Mariamne* into a tradition of humanist - that is, senecan - tragedy. Embedding Biblical plots in senecan diction goes back to Buchanan's neo-Latin plays of the 1540s and 50s. Hardy's classical references construct a physical and metaphysical framework for the actions of his characters. Mariamne, for instance, uses senecan *adynata* to demonstrate her willpower; before she will beg for mercy,

Thétis adonc perdra l'ordinaire amertume,

Phoebus ira s'éteindre où sa lampe s'allume,

[26] Reiss (1971), 19.
[27] Lockert (1968), 5.

Zephyre, accoustumé de suivre le Printemps,

Soufflera quand l'Hiver nous hérisse les champs,

Les Corbeaux vestiront du Cigne le plumage,

Philomèle avec eux échangeant son ramage (4.1, 1400-04).[28]

In the final scene, Hérode issues protestations of remorse like Seneca's Oedipus, Theseus, or - again - Hercules:

O Terre! Englouty moy dans des caves boyaux,

Ouvre le plus profond de tes gouffreux abysmes,

Et y plonge ce corps chargé de tant de crimes (1562-64).[29]

When he imagines himself tormented by Mariamne's vengeful ghost, the afterlife she inhabits is wholly classical. Ferried over the river that encircles the Underworld (1606), Mariamne now returns across the threshold of Hades (1614) to send Hérode into a frenzy of self-flagellation, appearing to her executioner in a Fury's guise, *cruelle, épouventable, en la demeure sombre, / Armée de flambeaux, de tortures, de fers* (1612-13). Her martyr's death hardly warrants relegation to Tartarus,[30] but in Hardy's classical cosmos her only reward can be the satisfaction of punishing her killer from beyond the grave. Hérode is gripped by torment so extreme it requires a running commentary:

Immobile sinon des paupières ouvertes,

[28] ['Thetis will lose her wonted saltiness, / Phoebus will quench his lamp where now he lights it, / Zephyrus (wontedly the spring's attendant) / will blow when winter fills our fields with stubble, / Ravens will wear the plumage of the swan / and Philomela change her notes for theirs.']

[29] ['O earth, engulf me in thy hollow bowels, / open the deepest of thy abysmal chasms, / and plunge therein this body laden with crimes.'] Compare *Oed*. 869-71; *Phaed*. 1201-03; *HF* 1221-26.

[30] On the representation of martyrdom in medieval and early modern French custom, see Ribemont (2003).

Qu'il contourne d'horreur et de flammes couvertes,

Sourd, estrangé de soy, stupide, forcené –

D'une brutalité maniaque mené,

Sa poitrine de coups l'homicide guerroye (1631-35).[31]

Although *Mariamne* makes no conscious claim on Seneca, it is representative of how senecan motifs made their way into the work of Hardy and his contemporaries, and shows how they remained in dramatic circulation.

Translating the *Tenne Tragedies*

Already considered the template for tragedy by French and Italian humanists,[32] Seneca received further promotion by the translation of his corpus into English. The process began with Jasper Heywood's *Troas* in 1559, followed by *Thyestes* (1560), *Hercules Furens* (1561), Alexander Nevile's *Oedipus* (1563) and Thomas Nuce's *Octavia* (1566); 1566 also saw John Studley's *Agamemnon*, *Medea* and *Hercules Oetaeus*, his *Hippolytus* following in 1567. For a decade the plays circulated as independent texts, and in 1581 Thomas Newton added the *Thebais* in order to publish the collection as a package: the *Tenne Tragedies*. Although these translations were not themselves performed,[33] the convergence of this newly-accessible material with the existing tradition of performance at the Inns of Court produced works like the multi-authored *Misfortunes of Arthur*, offering an insight into how Seneca was initially experienced in translation on the early modern stage.

[31] ['Motionless now, except his staring eyes, / brimming with rage and horror, which he rolls, / Deaf, out of his wits, in stupor, mad - / and now seized with maniacal savagery, / assailing his own flesh with savage blows.']
[32] Pollard (2010) notes the contribution of Greek tragedy to the development of tragic theory, particularly filtered by Aristotle.
[33] Sheen (2004), 165 states that the *Tenne Tragedies* were not written for performance (but also states that neither was Seneca, so may be less than reliable). There is certainly no record of any of the *Tenne* being staged.

The theory behind the composition of English Renaissance tragedy was derived in part from the *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*, but was more immediately indebted to mid-century European prescriptions for what tragedy ought to contain and how it ought to be constructed. The Italian humanist scholar Joseph Scaliger and playwright Cinthio Giraldi, whose 1541 *Orbecche* was among the first modern tragedies,[34] both expressed their strong preference for Seneca as a model. According to Giraldi, 'Seneca is superior to any and every Greek in artistic propriety, in the gravity, decorum, power and *sententiae* of all his tragedies.'[35] Scaliger likewise commended Seneca, *quem nullo Graecorum maiestate inferiorem existimo: cultu vero ac nitore etiam Euripide maiorem. Inventiones sane illorum sunt: at maiestas carminis, sonus, spiritus ipsius* (*Poetics* 6.6).[36] Like contemporary French theorist Jean de la Taille,[37] Scaliger considered the more sensational elements of ancient drama to be the proper content of tragedy: *Res tragicae* [*sunt*] *grandes, atroces, iussa Regum, caedes, desperationes, suspendia, exilia, orbitates, parricidia, incestus, incendia, pugnae, occaecationes, fletus, ululatus, conquestiones, funera* (*Poetics* 3.97). Incest, murder, royal atrocities on a grand scale: these, Scaliger felt, were more characteristic of the genre than such Athenian essentials as political debate, divine-human relations or ritualised public lament. The contribution of French and Italian precedent to the development of English senecanism has long been established by Charlton and others.[38] Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* (written in 1579), for example, implicitly maintains Seneca as the model for 'high and excellent Tragedy', which

[34] On *Orbecche*, see Lucas 1922: 94-95; Boyle (1997), 150-51.
[35] Giraldi, quoted in Charlton (1946), 30.
[36] ['Whom I esteem inferior to none of the Greeks; in style and polish he even surpasses Euripides; the plots may be theirs, but the magnificence of the verse, the sound, and the spirit are his own.']
[37] *Pitieuses ruines des grands Seigneurs, que des inconstances de Fortune, que bannissements, guerres, pestes, famines, captivitez, execrables cruautez des Tyrans, et bref, que larmes et misères extrèmes*. Taille, *Art de la Tragédie* (1572). Quoted in Mazouer (2002), 184.
[38] Charlton (1946). Norland (2009), 193-233 on the Pembroke circle and French neoclassicism, concluding that 'The major contribution that the translators of Garnier made to Elizabethan drama is the portrayal of emotion.' Braden (1985) comments that 'Much of what we call Renaissance Senecanism is really Italian Senecanism.'

> openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with Tissue… teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilded roofs are builded; that maketh us know, *Qui sceptra saevus duro imperio regit, / timet timentes, metus in authorem* [*sic*] *redit.*[39]

These lines are spoken by Creon in Seneca's *Oedipus* (705-06). Sidney regrets that so few English tragedies adhere to classical decorum, 'excepting *Gorboduc*… [which] is full of stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his stile.'[40] *Gorboduc*, the first Inns of Court experiment, contains an abundance of 'stately speeches' and 'well-sounding phrases', produced as it was by a community steeped in the professional exercise of rhetoric.

The publication of the collected *Tenne Tragedies* marked an important step in the transition of senecanism from the academic to the popular stage. Among their various translators, Studley, Nevyle and Nuce were Cambridge undergraduates, while Heywood was a Fellow of All Souls and Newton himself had attended Oxford before embarking on his career as professional poet and translator.[41] Latin performances of Seneca's plays enjoyed a spike of popularity in Cambridge during the early 1560s,[42] which may partially account for Studley's enthusiasm. Out of all the translators, Studley's is the style that stuck, becoming the default for English playwrights seeking a classical idiom.[43] Its highly alliterative rhyming fourteeners unravel the dense compression of Seneca's verse, enlarging on the existing *copia*. Studley adopts a verbal exuberance reminiscent of Roman Republican tragedy, coupled with

[39] Sidney [1595], 40.
[40] Sidney [1595], 66. Miola (1992), 1-2 cites further favourable opinions.
[41] For biographical information, see Norland (2009), 48-64.
[42] See above, p73n.1.
[43] As Spearing (1909), 460 remarks, 'It is difficult to distinguish how much of this debt of the Elizabethan dramatists to Seneca is due to the plays in the original, and how much to the translations… Probably their influence [sc. of the Tenne] was much greater than any examination of parallel passages in them and Elizabethan plays would lead us to suspect.'

a relish for the macabre and an earthy verbal repertoire: phrases such as 'draggling guts', 'scratting paws', 'muddy belching sand', 'slimy caves besmeared' and 'thumping with their horny hooves' add onomatopoeic texture. Whereas Seneca's Medea, for example, confines herself to:

> effera ignota horrida
> tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala
> mens intus agitat: vulnera et caedem (*Med*. 45-47)

Studley renders these lines as:

> Most hyddious, hatefull, horrible, to heare, or see wyth eyes,
> Most divelish, desperate, dreadfull dede, yet never known before,
> Whose rage shall force heaven, earth and hell to quake and tremble sore,
> My burning breast that rowles in wrath, and doth in rancour boyle,
> Sore thyrsteth after bloud and wounds with slaughter, death and spoyle (1.1).

As Eliot noted in his introduction to the *Tenne Tragedies*, the fourteener is an archaic meter more suited to pithy Anglo-Saxon words than to a polysyllabic Latinate vocabulary.[44] This brings Studley's language closer to the regional and raw; tragedy had not yet been purged of expressions considered insufficiently "classical" in tone. It was in this form, then, that English dramatists outside the academy encountered Seneca, making the *Tenne Tragedies* largely responsible for the stylistic legacy which became identified as "Senecan".

[44] Eliot, (1951) [1927], 102.

In his Preface to *Thyestes*, Heywood relates the vision which supposedly inspired him to embark on the translation, combining urbane *recusatio* with hallucinatory vividness. The sometime translator is visited in a dream by Seneca himself, descended from the sumptuous temple of the Muses to request that Heywood take up the task of disseminating his tragedies in English: 'if Senec's name thou love / Alive to keep, I thee beseech again to take thy pen / In metre of thy mother tongue to give to sight of men / My other works' (*Pref.* 52-55). Heywood protests that he is under-qualified; has Seneca considered asking one of the Inns of Court poets? In response, Seneca produces a tome written in gold ink on perfumed deerskin, a divine edition of the Complete Works, free from printers' blunders and textual errors (284-85). As Heywood begins to read it, he awakens; he remains haunted, however, by the vision:

> Sometimes I curs'd, sometimes I cry'd, like wight that waxéd wood,
> Or panther of her prey depriv'd, or tiger of her brood.
> A thousand times my colour goes, and comes as oft again;
> About I walked, I might nowhere in quiet rest remain (*Pref.* 327-30)

Unable to shake off the restlessness, he calls on Megaera for inspiration, and feels 'the Fury's force enflame me more and more' until he begins to write (*Pref.* 335-42). What began as a wry comment on the poor quality of Senecan transmission (e.g. 139-40) concludes by assimilating the translator to one of the playwright's own characters, obsessed and possessed, driven by Megaera to carry out Seneca's commands.

Heywood felt entirely justified in supplying what Seneca had unaccountably failed to work into his *Trojan Women*: a ghost. While the Tartarean instigator is not unknown in

Seneca, and many of the plays involve returns from the Underworld,[45] the ghost whose thirst for revenge compels him to rise for blood is largely an Elizabethan elaboration.[46] Seneca's Achilles calls through Talthybius' mouth for the Greeks to surrender his rightful spoils of war (*debitos manibus meis / ... honores* (191-92), but Heywood's Achilles is ascribed the additional motive of vengeance on the royal house of Troy in terms that would not disgrace *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Don Andrea:

> The deepe Averne my rage may not sustayne,
> Nor beare the angers of Achilles spright.
> …
> Hell could not hide Achilles from the light,
> Vengeance and bloud doth Orcus pit require,
> To quench the furies of Achilles yre (2.136-42).

Heywood clearly identifies in his preface where his insertions occur, explaining that as 'this worke seemed unto mee in some places imperfite' he has therefore 'supplied the wante of some thynges.' A Senecan play was evidently incomplete without a senecan ghost. Like William Gager, Heywood found it entirely appropriate to compound his translation with elements sourced from a broader stream of receptive consciousness.

Shortly after the collected *Tenne Tragedies* were published, Cambridge graduate Thomas Hughes collaborated on a tragedy entitled *The Misfortunes of Arthur* for presentation at Gray's Inn (1588).[47] The Inns of Court, like the universities which fed them, boasted a long history of high-quality amateur theatricals (Revels), often attended by royalty and other court

[45] e.g. *Furens* 658-827, *Phaed*. 829-53, *Troades* 168-202, *Oed*. 548-658, *Ag*. 1-56 & *Thy*. 1-121 Although Seneca's Achilles remains offstage, the ghost of Polydorus performs the role in Euripides' *Hecuba*.
[46] Wells (1991); Kerrigan (1996), esp. 38 and 111-13.
[47] Hughes was largely responsible for the printed text, but Norland (2009), 95 notes the collaborative authorship and points to several other contributors including Francis Bacon.

dignitaries, many of whom would have participated in similar extracurricular productions during their own preparation for public office. Like university drama, these performances were staged in a hall temporarily adapted for the purpose before a relatively specialist audience of classically educated peers.[48] The small platform stage limited opportunities for action. Meanwhile, the audience's presumed interest in policy and jurisprudence led Hughes to develop his set-piece debates on the dilemmas and personal cost of holding power into longer, more nuanced scenes than their Senecan counterparts. Rhetorical training fed naturally into the production of English tragedy at the Inns of Court. Seneca's studies in passion, with their formal deliberative soliloquies, were readily adaptable to both the staging conditions and the art of presentational *actio* practiced by the performers.

Seneca is a major presence in *Arthur*.[49] The play opens with the ghost of the murdered Gorlois rising from the 'deepe infernall floude of Stygian poole' and exhorting himself to take revenge on his descendants: 'Wreake all at once, infect the air with plagues, / till badd to worse, till worse to worst be turned; / Let mischiefes know no meane, nor plagues an end. / Let th'offspring's crime exceede the former stocke' (1.1.2, 20-23). King Arthur's son Mordred, himself the offspring of an incestuous union, has become the lover of Arthur's wife Guenevora during the king's absence fighting (and conquering) Rome. Clans tainted and haunted by the crimes of former generations feature in many of Seneca's plays, along with the characteristic twist that each generation will not only suffer under the curse but will be driven to commit fouler and fouler offences. Gorlois' apparition is followed by a Clytemnestran Guenevora in agonised conversation with her *satelles* (1.2). Determined at first to 'seek our undared plagues, teach Mordred how to rage' and accomplish evil 'beyond Medea's wiles' (1.2.6-12), she then describes her ebbing anger in typically senecan

[48] On drama as part of revels at the Inns of Court see Green (1931), 56-96. On features of the hall and possible configurations of the stage, see Southern (1973), 414-20. Evidently the stage erected for *Arthur* was high enough to enable Gorlois to enter from 'below'; Green (1931), 142 records that a "grett scaffold" was erected for *Gorboduc*.
[49] Cunliffe (1925), 130ff.

dissociative terms: ‘What’s this? My mind recoyls […] My furie faints’ (1.2.29-31). In order to rekindle the blaze, she issues an Atrean summons:

> Come, spitefull fiends, come heapes of furies fell,
> Not one by one, but all at once; my breast
> Raves not inough: it likes me to be filde
> With greater monsters yet. My heart doth throb:
> My liver boyles: some thing my mind portendes,
> Uncertayne what: but whatsoe’er, it’s huge.
> So it exceede, be what it will: it’s well.
> Omit no plague, and none will be inough.
> Wrong cannot be reveng’d, but by excesse (1.2.39-47).

This Senecan pastiche contains a number of senecan tropes: the sense of insufficiency, the appeal to monstrous, inhuman forces to take control, the description of internal physical sensations, and the reiteration that ‘excesse’ is to be the solution to suffering. At the end of 2.4, Mordred reflects on his own self-destructive impulse toward excess, while seemingly unable to restrain himself from pursuing this headlong dash to disaster:

> A troubled head: my minde revolts to feare,
> and beares my body back: I inwards feele my fall.
> […]
> What though I be a ruine to the Realme,
> and fall my selfe therewith? No better end.
> […]

A solemne pompe, and fit for Mordreds minde,

To be a grave and tombe to all his Realme (2.4.80-93).

Like Seneca's Medea, Mordred feels that *sola est quies / mecum ruina cuncta si video obruta; / mecum omnia abeant. Trahere, cum pereas, libet* (*Med*. 426-28).

As well as these longer passages, *Arthur* is studded with Senecan tags throughout. 'Great harmes cannot be hidde, the griefe is small, / that can receave advise, or rule it self,' Guenevora declares (*levis est dolor qui capere consilium potest*, *Med*. 155). All is lost, she feels, and yet, 'My selfe am left, ther's left both seas and lands, / And sword, and fire, and chaines, and choice of harmes'. Here, the syntax of *Medea* 166-67 is combined the no less Senecan observation that the means for suicide are to be found everywhere, if one is sufficiently resourceful (*Phaed*. 878; *Phoen*. 147-53). Taunted by Mordred with her guilt, she retorts with Medea's defence that 'Well should she seeme most guiltlesse unto thee, / Whate'er she be, that's guiltie for thy sake' (1.4.58-59; cf. *Med*. 503). Simultaneously, echoes of the Phaedra-Hippolytus relationship are activated by the distinctive syntax applied by Mordred to his hatred of political rivals: 'I hate a peere, / I loath, I yrke, I doe detest a head. / B'it Nature, be it Reason, be it Pride, / I love to rule' (1.4.112-15; cf. *Phaed*. 566-68). Confronted by his son's treachery, Arthur repeats Theseus' condemnation of Hippolytus: 'Th'ambicious seemeth meeke, the wanton chast, / Disguised vice for vertue vants itself' (3.1.14-15; cf. *Phaed*. 918-22). In a further nod to *Phaedra,* the Nuncius precedes his announcement of the mutual defeat of father and son with one of the period's favourite quotations: 'Small griefes can speake: the great astonisht stand' (4.2.14; cf. Phaed. 607, *curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent*).[50] Finally, as Arthur exits to his death, he relates the collapse of his kingdom to universal *ekpyrosis* with the lines from *Thyestes*' chorus: 'Too

[50] Johnson (1948), 48-49 lists the appearances of the phrase.

much / they lov'd to live, that seeing all their Realme / thus topsie-turvey turned, would grudge to dye' (5.1.148-50; cf *Thy*. 883-84).

It remains to consider in what respect *The Misfortunes of Arthur* constitutes translation. Despite the verbal strands that tether it to *Phaedra*, *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, and *Thyestes*, the play frequently travels in non-senecan directions. Guenevora, instead of killing herself, enters a nunnery ('deathe to the world', 1.3.70); Arthur delivers a moral homily on the exercise of clemency; Mordred dies heroically, even in the act of parricide; and Gorlois' shade returns to predict a glorious future for Britain under the sign of 'Virgo'. The authors participate throughout in the common Elizabethan pursuit of *translatio imperii studiique*, assuming the mantle of political and artistic supremacy inherited through Arthur's line from Britain's mythical Roman founder, Aeneas' descendant "Brutus".[51] Under Elizabeth I, Britain was to become New Troy, the successor to Roman glory. Hughes' co-option of Senecan material for a British legend, his syncretic identification of the classical House of Atreus with the native House of Pendragon, performs a similar function. *Arthur* shows Seneca translated not only into the English language and English theatrical idiom, but into the very stuff of English myth.

English(ed) Seneca

From the 1580s, the senecan aesthetic began to appear in mainstream English drama. The cultural revolution initiated by the first purpose-built playhouse, Burbage's Theatre, in 1578 has received perhaps more scholarly attention than any other period in theatre history, and Seneca's contribution to dramatic form between 1578 and 1600 has therefore been variously established, contested, debated, denied, played up, played down and reinstated.[52] Pre-

[51] On the ideology of *translatio imperii studiique*, see James (1997).
[52] Baldwin (1959), Baker (1965), and Hunter (1967) play down Seneca's influence or deny it outright. Braden (1985), Miola (1992), and Norland (2011), however, support it. For early assessments, see Lucas (1922),

Shakespearean dramatists such as Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe and the lesser-known George Peele, who may have had a hand in *Locrine* and *Titus Andronicus*, seized on those aspects of senecanism already exaggerated by Studley and the other translators of the *Tenne Tragedies*, grafting them into colourful plots derived from chronicles, novellas, or existing European plays. Seneca became synonymous with tyranny, revenge, and supernatural intervention, tropes whose widespread popularity is satirised in the prologue to *A Warning for Faire Women* (c.1590). Tragedy typically relates

> How some damn'd tyrant to obtain a crown,
> Stabs, hangs, impoisons, smothers, cutteth throats,
> And then a Chorus too comes howling in
> And tells us of the worrying of a cat:
> Then too a filthy whining ghost
> Lapt in some foul sheet, or a leather pilch
> Comes screaming like a pig half-stick'd,
> And cries *Vindicta*! – Revenge, Revenge! (50-57).[53]

In his roughly contemporary preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (1589), Thomas Nashe makes similar complaints about the pervasiveness of dilettante senecanism:

> English Seneca read by candle-light yields many good sentences, as Blood is a beggar, and so forth, and if you entreat him fair on a frosty morning, he will afford you whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches. But O grief! *Tempus*

Charlton (1946), Cunliffe (1925); for other perspectives or studies of particular plays, see Rees (1969), Lloyd Evans (1965), Binns (1974), Martindale & Taylor (eds. 2004), and Boyle (1997).

[53] The play is of uncertain authorship. Cannon (1975), 25-48 dates it to the late 1580s.

> *edax rerum*, what's that will last always?... Seneca, let blood line by line and page by page, at length must needs die to our stage.[54]

Once the *Tenne Tragedies* were on the market, in Nashe's acerbic opinion, Seneca was no longer the province of specialists but a vulgar resource available to any half-literate would-be poet. This section, then, deals with the most well-studied episode in Seneca's Anglophone reception, and as such it is highly selective. I touch only briefly on Shakespeare's use of Seneca,[55] and concentrate instead on more marginal and certainly more senecan plays: Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and Peele's *Locrine*.

Reconstructions of the Elizabethan public playhouse are based on a combination of archaeological, pictorial and anecdotal data.[56] Plays at the Rose were performed on a platform only 5m deep. The tiring house behind the stage provided three entrances, the central one large enough to accommodate a bed, a chariot or a throne. Part of the stage may have been covered by a canopy, and there seems to have been space 'above' for musicians or for scenes requiring an upper level. The audience occupied two separate zones, the so-called 'groundlings' standing clustered around three sides of the platform in a large raked yard while more well-off patrons sat in tiered galleries above.[57] All performances took place in daylight, and required active engagement from an audience who shared the space with the performers.[58] Despite the pleasure evidently afforded by spectacular moments such as sword-fights, appearances from Hell, or the revelation of corpses, Elizabethan playhouses were less concerned with sightlines or verisimilitude than with ensuring audible dialogue:

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[54] Nashe (1880).
[55] This has been the subject of a 1992 study by Robert Miola. Schleiner (1990) argues convincingly that Greek drama was also an (indirect) influence.
[56] Gurr (2009), 151-64; our best sources are the excavations of the Rose foundations and the contemporary illustration of the Swan by de Witt.
[57] Gurr (2009), 139-208.
[58] White (1998), 121 refers to the 'active relationship and physical proximity of actor and audience required by Elizabethan and Jacobean plays'.

> Elizabethan and early Stuart playgoers were raised to listen rather than to watch, which meant that being within hearing distance was far more important than seeing something in front of you… The early playhouses relished using their three dimensions rather than the scenic two which is what the primacy of the eye requires.[59]

Just as Renaissance playwrights recovered and refashioned the elements of Greco-Roman theatrical discourse, Renaissance architects began their own practical dialogue with the elements of theatrical space.[60] Like a Roman theatre, this space was an aural reservoir. Smith shows that 'the South Bank amphitheatres were, in fact, instruments for producing, shaping and propagating sound,'[61] in particular the live human voice with all its quirks, contingencies and bodily colouring. Cognitive processing of human speech involves a much more complex synthesis of factors than straightforward verbal recognition. Elements more akin to music - dynamics and intonation, prosody, pitch and phrasing, rhythm and tempo, timbre, harmonics and tone, the degree of consonantal attack and duration of vowels - determine how the stream of auditory data is received,[62] influencing how the raw manipulation of vocal apparatus (diaphragmatic contraction, resonators, airstream and its periodic interruptions) acquires, in certain configurations, kinaesthetic significance. Poetic or rhetorical discourse can be recited in a mumble, a drawl, a monotone or an artificially emphatic singsong ("overacting"), or indeed prevented from successfully reaching its audience by any of the vocal faults classified

[59] Gurr (2009), 197. Also Smith (1988), 83: 'Elizabethan audiences thought about the play, not as an object that needed to be placed in perspective, but as a rhetorical event.'
[60] Carlson (1989), 38-42.
[61] Smith (1999), 206.
[62] It has not been conclusively determined whether linguistic and non-linguistic auditory information is processed in separate areas of the brain, how components of a soundscape are isolated as linguistic in the first place, or how non-verbal acoustic information stimulates memory and thus interpretation. See the collection of articles in McAdams & Bigand (1993) for a range of perspectives. McAdams (1993), 150-51 gives a useful outline of the physiology of hearing; on the physiology of speech, see Smith (1999) and Bloom (2007).

by Quintilian and corroborated by Shakespearean verse specialist Cicely Berry.[63] The affective properties of dramatic speech are complex and often elusive,[64] but nevertheless derived from principles which can be taught and reproduced.

Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, which in 1587 was one of the earliest English plays to introduce classical structure, idiom and vocabulary into mainstream theatre, became practically synonymous with "rant".[65] Its hyperbolic, bravura monologues,[66] its Herculean hero operating at the limits of human capacity (played in the first instance by Edward Alleyn, who came to specialise in senecan roles),[67] and its relentless pitch made it both enduringly popular and a ready target for later satire. Senecan features include the recurring trope of excess, often figured in numerical terms;[68] use of typical rhetorical devices such as *adynata*;[69] frequent invocations of the Furies and other Tartarean horrors, often embedded in curses or calls for revenge;[70] a delight in onomatopoeic alliteration that verges on the Studleyan ('Fearing the force of Boreas' boisterous blasts,' I.2.5.5); and glancing references such as Tamburlaine's warning that his chariot might 'draw thee piecemeal like Hippolytus' (II.5.3.240). References to cannibalism during the banquet where Tamburlaine has his victims tortured as vindictive entertainment lend it a Thyestean flavour.[71] Marlowe also employs the widespread early modern senecan technique of having characters describe their

[63] Berry (1973), 43: 'slightly too much or too little pressure on the consonants, clipping vowels, devoicing final voiced consonants, too much nasal resonance.' On Quintilian, see Ch. 2.
[64] See Bloom (2007) on the unpredictability of the adolescent voice, in particular.
[65] cf. Marston's *Antonio & Mellida*, Ind.91-92 where Felice mocks Mazzagente's fulminating: 'Rampum, scampum, mount tufty Tamburlaine! What rattling thunderclap breaks from his lips?'
[66] Examples include I.4.2.36-55; II.3.2.1-14; II.4.1.193-206
[67] Gurr (2009), 109, 113.
[68] For example, Scythians 'in number infinite' (I.2.2.43); the 'host of Xerxes' is 'but a handful' in comparison (I.2.3.15-18); 'millions infinite of men' (I.3.3.32); his troops outnumber 'the quivering leaves / of Ida's forest.' (II.3.5.5-6); 'a monster of five hundred thousand heads' (I.4.3.7)
[69] For example, 'Could their numbers countervail the stars, / Or ever-drizzling drops of April showers…' (I.4.1.30); Tamburlaine will not cease fighting until 'When heaven shall cease to move on both the poles, / And when the ground whereon my soldiers march / Shall rise aloft and touch the horned moon.' (II.1.3.12-14)
[70] 3.3.138-40; also Bajazeth at 4.2.27:'Fiends, look on me, and thou dread god of hell, / with ebon sceptre strike this hateful earth / And make it swallow both of us at once!' Also 4.4.17-20 'Ye Furies, that can mask invisible, / Dive to the bottom of Avernus' pool / and in your hands bring hellish poison up / And squeeze it in the cup of Tamburlaine.'
[71] 4.4.45-52; also 4.4.23-25 Zabina: 'And may this banquet prove as ominous / As Procne's to th'adulterous Thracian king / That fed upon the substance of his child.'

own physical pain with impossible eloquence. Shot in battle, the Captain feels 'my liver pierced, and all my veins / … Mangled and torn, and all my entrails bathed / In blood that straineth from their orifex' (II.3.4.5-9).

The inadequacy of language, however, haunts *Tamburlaine* throughout, right from the opening line in which Mycetes declares, 'I find myself aggrieved / Yet insufficient to express the same / For it requires a great and thund'ring speech' (I.1.1.1-3). A similar insufficiency afflicts young Celebimus as he protests that 'My mother's death hath mortified my mind / And sorrow stops the passage of my speech' (II.3.2.51-52). Tamburlaine, however, has no such difficulty. Whereas grief silences his sons, he himself launches into a catalogue of everything he will teach them about warfare (II.3.2.54-129). Infuriated at the gods' temerity in permitting his beloved wife to die, he proposes hysterically to 'batter the shining palace of the sun / And shiver all the starry firmament' (II.2.4.105-06) until his companion Theridamas points out that 'all this raging cannot make her live', and even Tamburlaine's blazing energy, whether verbal or military, is impotent against the unutterable finality of death. Tamburlaine's own trajectory from superhuman conqueror with Olympian aspirations to suffering mortal brought down not by an enemy but by an insidious 'distemper' (II.5.2.218) follows that of the Senecan and pseudo-Senecan Hercules. His Herculean affiliations are made explicit during Part I,[72] and the irony of a mass-murdering world-conquering hero who can subdue any external threat but succumbs to the killer within his own body has its roots in *Hercules Oetaeus*. Tamburlaine's humanity progressively evaporates over the course of the plays, as he declares himself not just 'arch-monarch', but 'since I exercise a greater name, / The scourge of God and terror of the world, / I must apply myself to fit these terms, / In war, in blood, in death, in cruelty' (II.4.1.62-65). Like Seneca's Medea, Tamburlaine is fulfilling a

[72] 1.2.39-40; 1.2.158-59; 2.1.10-11; etc. For discussion see Waith (1962), 60-87.

role which drives him to commit flamboyant, theatricalised atrocities.[73] He receives no consequential retribution, but unlike Seneca's Medea has his ambitions curtailed by common mortality. In the end, his ballooning rhetoric finds no collateral in his flesh.[74] A play which began with the fear that speech may prove insufficient to express the excesses (the residue) of the body now comes down on a body proven insufficient to express the excesses of speech.

Roughly contemporary with *Tamburlaine*, Thomas Kyd's paradigmatic revenge drama *The Spanish Tragedy* is framed by the commentary of Don Andrea's vengeful ghost, who regards the multiple murders before him as 'spectacles to please my soul' (4.5.12). Kyd's emphasis on enacting rather than relating violence displaces senecan rhetoric,[75] but at the same time brands itself as Senecan. Hieronimo talks - or reads - himself into revenge using a copy of Seneca's tragedies, possibly wilfully misconstrued. The 1603 edition of *The Spanish Tragedy* specifies that Hieronymo enters 'with a Booke in his hand', but it is left ambiguous as to whether it is supposed to represent the Bible – which would contain the phrase *Vindicta mihi* (3.13.1) – or Seneca's tragedies, which would contain Hieronymo's other quotations: *per scelus semper tutum est sceleribus iter* (*Ag*. 115), *Fata si miseros iuvant, habes salutem; / Fata si vitam negant, habes sepulchrum* (*Tro*. 511-12), and *remedium malorum iners est* (*Oed*. 515).[76] As McMillin points out, the lines quoted 'are wrenched from their original meaning,' because none of the Senecan situations cited concern revenge.[77] Whether or not the tags are plumbed for intertextual irony, their free-floating application establishes an ethos alternative to the Christian subordination to God's *vindicta mihi*. Even this phrase acquires a new, sharper flavour, however, as Hieronimo turns it over

[73] E.g. the execution of the virgins and the governor, and harnessing conquered kings to his chariot.
[74] His illness may be construed as punishment for impiety, but this is not made explicit. Equally, it may be construed as blood-poisoning from the self-inflicted wound in II.3.2, but again nothing in the text confirms this. Waith (1962), 82-83 calls his 'self-wounding' part of 'a collaboration with death and fate in the destruction of his physical being'.
[75] Hunter (1974).
[76] 3.13.6, 12-13 & 35. Mulryne (1997), ad loc. identifies the book as Seneca.
[77] McMillin (1974), 207.

in his mouth and in doing do claims it for his own. Recontextualised, the tags soak up sense from their target environment over and above their significance in Kyd's Senecan resource. The scene attributes to Seneca an educative function. Even if the lesson is misconstrued or mis-applied, its effect is to construct Seneca as the inspiration behind Hieronymo's creative revenge. As in *Titus Andronicus*, the classical text is translated into dramatic action, implicitly contrasted with the book in Hieronymo's hand.

*Locrine*, most likely staged in the mid-1580s although our earliest edition was printed in 1595,[78] is another revenge-tragedy set in the mythic past of Albion. Its authorship is uncertain, but one candidate is poet George Peele.[79] Although it lacks the single-minded trajectory of Seneca's plays, its triple cycle of revenge killings affords a reduplication of the vindictive ghost-figure and several speeches clamouring for Tartarean backup:

*Humber*:

You ugly sprites that in Cocytus mourn,

And gnash your teeth with dolorous laments:

You fearful dogs that in black Lethe howl,

And scare the ghosts with your wide-open throats:

You ugly ghosts that, flying from these dogs,

Do plunge your selves in Puryflegiton […]

Come, ugly Furies, armed with your black whips

You threefold judges of black Tartarus,

And all the army of you hellish fiends,

With new-found torments rack proud Locrin's bones!' (3.6.13-25)

[78] Brooke, xx; Gooch (1981), 6-10.

[79] Brooke; Gooch (1981), 27-32. Other candidates are Robert Greene or Charles Tilney. The W.__ S.__ on the title page is highly unlikely to be Shakespeare. Gooch (1981), 32 suggests that the work as we have it is most likely to be the product of multiple collaborative revisions over a period of time.

Humber is then confronted by the ghost of his own former victim Albaract, wailing 'Revenge… *Vindicta, Vindicta*!' (3.6.54). (It is not specified whether he is lap't in a filthy sheet.) The repetition of this trope entraps the participants in an inescapable, almost mechanical round of ebullient eulogy, abject defeat and furious backlash. Guendoline, the stereotypical jealous wife thirsting to 'glut [her] mind' with her rival's blood (5.4.166), is also motivated by the apparition of her father's ghost, likewise crying 'Revenge!' (5.4.169). A more subtle Senecan allusion is performed by Humber's anti-pastoral lament during his exile, which inverts Hippolytus' adulation of the simple life (*Phaed*. 483-539) and combines it with Hercules' internal agony (*HO* 1218-20, 1249-50):

> Long have I lived in this desert cave
> With eating haws and miserable roots,
> Devouring leaves and beastly excrements.
> Caves were my beds, and stones my pillow-bears,
> Fear was my sleep, and horror was my dream.
> […] What Euphrates, what lightfoot Euripus,
> May now allay the fury of that heat,
> which, raging in my entrails, eats me up? (4.4 1-15)

The conceit of being consumed by starvation is also a neatly turned reference to Tantalus. The most prevalent aspect of the senecan aesthetic in *Locrine*, however, is its hyperbole, its persistent overuse of classical allusions: the sun cannot rise without the chariot of Lucifer (2.2.80-82), nor loyalty be pledged without invoking all the torments of 'black Tartarus'

(1.1.75). It is in this respect, perhaps, that Studley's contribution is most evident. English Seneca provides the vocabulary for unrestrained embellishment.

By comparison, Shakespeare's use of Seneca is diffuse and sporadic, contributing mainly to what Miola calls the 'infrastructure' of his dramatic form.[80] Miola charts what may in fact be regarded as the failures of senecanism in Shakespearean tragedy, as senecan tropes are activated only to be discarded or complicated by other aspects of character or situation. Hamlet, for instance (c. 1600), flirts with the role of revenger that an old-style play like *The Mouse-Trap* would have contained: 'Hell itself breathes out / Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood / And do such bitter business as the day / Would quake to look on' (3.2.381-84), but he cannot fulfil it. Lady Macbeth (c.1605), as Purkiss has shown, draws on *Medea*, attempting to behave as though her universe were a Senecan *Natura* in sympathy with crime, failing to recognise that she is instead playing out 'a providential tragedy which she cannot transcend by wickedness.'[81] Macbeth's senecan justification that 'I am in blood / Stepped so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er (3.4.142-44) has already passed through Clytemnestra, Hieronymo and Richard III,[82] and its application signals his fatal adherence to an inappropriate genre. Similarly, King Lear's futile determination (c.1605) to 'have such revenges on you both / That all the world shall – I will do such things - / What they are I know not, but they will be / The terrors of the earth!' (2.4.279-82) is abandoned *en route* to a different kind of tragic resolution. Even *Richard III*, which Muir has called 'the most Senecan of Shakespeare's plays,' retains the rhetorical formality of its immediate precursors but is already moving towards tonal hybridity.[83] As Miola would have it, Seneca as a stylistic resource 'proves inadequate to the complexities' of

[80] Miola (1992), 33.
[81] Purkiss (2000), 45.
[82] *Ag*. 115; *Spanish Tragedy* 3.13.6; *Richard III* 4.2.62-63. Lucas (1922), 131 lists all the instances.
[83] Muir (1977), 37. On Seneca in *Richard III*, see Brooks (1980), esp. 734-35. Brooks concedes that Richard's Machiavellian progress owes as much to the medieval Vice as to Atreus.

Shakespeare's protagonists and their dilemmas.[84] On the other hand, however, just as in *Tamburlaine*, it could be said that Shakespeare's human-scale creations prove inadequate to the rhetoric inherited from their titanic antecedents.

Baroque tragedy: the *merveilleux*

Just as English theatre experimented in the early seventeenth century with mixing genres and inserting ironic references to the development of its medium, so French theatre likewise entered a phase of playful self-referentiality. Furthermore, the resources now available to Paris' permanent indoor venues, the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the Théâtre du Marais, prompted the introduction of much more elaborate scenery and special effects. Hardy's tragic theatre was succeeded by a period (approximately 1625 to 1640) in which what Reiss identifies as a 'baroque' relationship to theatrical language and illusion predominated.[85] Baroque spectators sought neither incorporation into a world-view nor identification with a character. Instead, they renounced profundity, preferring what Marian Hobson terms *papillotage*, a rapid and colourful "oscillation" between awareness of content and appreciation of the medium.[86] Not surprisingly, the genres which admitted this most readily were romantic tragi-comedies, pastorals and operatic spectacle. Although exchanging prognostications of despair for witty repartee, the utterances of baroque characters - as in earlier theatre - still constructed an ever-shifting environment rather than being locked in a single location. The Académie had yet to publicly lay out the *Règles* (Rules) of neoclassical tragedy; although their formulation was imminent, the demands of *vraisemblance* (verisimilitude) had therefore not yet clamped down on such free adaptations as Rotrou's *Hercule Mourant* (1634), La Pinelière's *Hippolyte* (also 1634) and Corneille's early-career

[84] Miola (1992), 162.
[85] Reiss (1971), 57; 68; 108-15.
[86] Hobson (1982).

*Médée* (1635).[87] Only after the dispute over dramaturgy termed the *Querelle du Cid* did the pressure of regulation become overwhelming.[88]

Over the course of the seventeenth century, French theatre architecture and scenography developed in conjunction with texts that in turn incorporated its transformations of tragic space. Works such as *Hercule Mourant* employed the convention known as *décor simultané,* wherein different parts of the stage were designated as different locations which an actor could occupy merely by adopting and identifying a new position.[89] Unused elements of set (such as prisons, temples or ships) could be hidden by curtains until revealed. We are fortunate in possessing a series of designs and commentaries compiled by Laurent Mahelot, scenic artist at the Bourgogne and later the Comédie Française. They reproduce a representative sample of the backcloths as well as records of additional scenery and effects. Sets from the 1630s could be as extravagant as the one recorded for Durval's tragicomedy *Les Travaux d'Ulysse* (1631), which included a hidden Underworld (complete with Styx, Charon and Sisyphus' mountain), Jupiter's throne, the palace of Circe, the island of the Sirens, the garden of the Hesperides and the open sea.[90] Mahelot's entry for Rotrou's 1634 *Hercule Mourant*, based closely on *Hercules Oetaeus*, opens with the unambiguous instruction *Le theatre doit estre superbe,* and concludes with a stunning apotheosis:

> *Au cinquiesme acte, un tonnerre, et après le ciel s'ouvre et Hercule descend du ciel en terre dans une nue; le globe doit etre empli des douzes signes et nues et les douze*

[87] Rotrou continued producing "baroque" works well into the 1640s. Reiss (1971), 155n.38. On Rotrou as baroque playwright, see Watts (1982), 76-85.
[88] Despite its enduring popularity, Corneille's *Le Cid* (1637) was attacked by influential critics on both formal and moral grounds due to its failure to observe the Unities strictly, and the implausibility of a heroine marrying her father's killer. See Levi (2000), 169-71; Bray (1951), 271-75; Couton (1986), 17-19; Scherer (1984), 45-46 & 52-53.
[89] Lawrenson (1986), 117 & 129; Viala (1997), 162-63.
[90] Mahelot (1920), 83.

*vents, des étoiles ardentes, soleil en escarboucle transparente et autres ornements à la fantasie du feinture*.[91]

*Hercule Mourant* sends a senecan plot into baroque convolutions. Despite outbursts of rhetoric that would not have disgraced Garnier, however, it has also been recognised as the first play to make a move towards "regular" tragedy.[92] Rotrou creates a condition where excessive protestations of devotion (such as Iole's to Arcas), unlikely lapses of judgment (such as Déjanire's failure to suspect the poison even after it sears the ground), and egregious cruelty (such as Hercule's demand that Arcas be sacrificed at his tomb) appear not absurd, but rather inexorable. This atmosphere of inescapable necessity results from the progress of its spoken discourse. Patterns of reiterated keywords pertaining to the play's physical, emotional and mythic environment, combined with the insistent rhythm, collude in producing the mounting hysteria. Hercule, defined by his role as *Dompteur de l'Univers* (*HM* 1467), now succumbs himself, first figuratively to the charms of a slave and then to the literal domination of death. The mastered-master, conqueror-conquered motif rings repeatedly in the audience's ears, along with the litany of Hercule's victories over *le Ciel, la terre, & l'onde*, not to mention *les Enfers*, and the adversaries chosen to represent his Labours: *Hidre, Lion* and *Cerbère*. Hercule, inextricably bound to his conquests, will be destroyed by his very "indomptability" on the brink of deification. *Quel Cerbère nouveau?* weeps Alcmène. *Quel monstre Achérontide? / Quel Lion? ou quelle Hidre? a triomphé d'Alcide?* (*HM* 1013-14). Hercule likewise attributes his pain to the rabid saliva of Cerberus, or the Hydra's venom. Compare the protean scourge of the Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus*: *utrumne serpens squalidum*

[91] ['In the fifth act, a thunderclap, and then the sky opens and Hercules descends from heaven to earth in a cloud; the globe should be full of the twelve [zodiac] signs, and clouds, and the twelve winds, and burning stars, sunlight in a transparent gemstone, and whatever other ornaments appeal to the painter's fancy.'] Mahelot (1920), 103. Morel (1975), 105-06 notes the importance of *Hercule Mourant* as it is '*la première tragédie francaise adaptée de Sénèque dont nous connaissons précisément la decoration, et donc les conditions concrètes de la représentation*.'
[92] Watts (1982), 75.

*crista caput / vibrans, an aliquod et mihi ignotum es malum? / numquid cruore es genita Lernaeae ferae, / an te reliquit Stygius in terris canis? / omne es malum nullumque! quis vultus tibi est?* (*HO* 1254-57).[93] Hercule is not altogether wrong, as Nessus' blood indeed represents a trace of the hero's own past. Consequences, in Hercule's *Univers*, result less from linear cause-and-effect than from the catastrophic gravitational field of his own supremacy.

Finally, however, *le Ciel s'ouvre* (*HM* 1444-45) and Hercule descends in the spectacular display described by Mahelot. The *deus ex machina* that concludes Rotrou's play illustrates its adherence to the baroque. After 1400 lines, the hypnotic momentum of Rotrou's alexandrines is interrupted as Hercule delivers his celestial proclamation. Transfigured from irascible bully into beneficent deity, he releases the lovers, comforts Alcmène and secures a resurrection-cult (*HM* 1451-66). *O divin accident*! cries Alcmène, as he re-ascends to join *la trouppe immortelle*.[94] *Rompons, rompons ces fers*! (1471). The fetters have indeed fallen away. The dramatic compulsion which chained Arcas to defiance, Alcmène to ferocity, and Iole to suicide has been dissolved into instantaneous *bon-heur sans pareil* (1483). These compulsions were produced by the rhythmic and linguistic currents surging through the preceding action, irresistible until their progress was impeded and their contingency exposed. Playfully, ruthlessly, Rotrou discards the illusion of senecan intransigence and supplants it with the illusion of transcendent redemption.

The second piece of baroque Seneca produced at the Bourgogne in 1634 was La Pinelière's *Hippolyte*. Recognisably Senecan, it nevertheless contains elements characteristic of a self-conscious theatrical mode. No act performed by a ruler is private; all is observed,

[93] See also *HO* 1349-51, 1359-63. In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, however, Herakles unambiguously identifies Deianeira's poison 1050, (1162); the only reference to other Labours in this context is the Chorus' description of the poison as δεινοτέρῳ ὕδρας (836).
[94] On Hercule as a Christian-humanist hero, see Morel (1973), 97.

and yet the audience dissembles ignorance. [95] La Pinelière makes this metatheatrical point in a scene between two of Phèdre's maids. Hesione asks the cause of Phèdre's affliction; Procris replies, *Hesione, Procris ne te peut rien celer, / C'est trop, c'est trop en fin te le dissimuler* (633-34), and proceeds to give a gossipy account of the queen's incestuous passion. Hesione, more prudent, advises her friend that

> C'est un grand art en Cour que de se sçavoir taire.
> Il faut tout ignorer, ou le feindre du moins;
> Les passions des Roys n'ayment pas les témoins (652-54).[96]

The theatrical duplicity of the royal court, the masks worn by princes and courtiers alike, provides La Pinelière with a typically baroque angle from which to approach this play so concerned with concealment, exposure and pretence. He also acknowledges the presence of spectating witnesses (*témoins*) by punctuating the dialogue with lines delivered aside (*à l'escart*). On occasion, these asides invite the audience to conspire in conflicting points of view, as when Hesione exclaims, *Veut-elle en cet habit sortir de la maison? / On dira que la Reyne a perdu la raison* (605-06), and Phèdre immediately steps out of her madness to explain, unheard by other characters, that *La mère d'Hippolyte estoit de cette sorte* (607). The humorous effect of this juxtaposition need not detract from the tragedy, however. It merely draws attention to the feigning of the actors, commensurately highlighting their professional skill in representing pain.

Produced the following year at the Bourgogne's rival venue, the Théâtre du Marais, Corneille's *Médée* likewise falls within this baroque period when theatre revelled in

[95] Greenberg (1992) on theatre and absolutism.
[96] ['It's a great art at Court to know how to play dumb. / You have to stay ignorant, or at least feign it; / the passions of monarchs have no witnesses.'] Greenberg (1992) discusses baroque theatricality in the context of absolutism.

displaying the mechanics of deception. Supernatural effects could still be exploited on the tragic stage without offending against *vraisemblance*,[97] and it is therefore not surprising that Corneille focuses on Médée as *sorcière*, her glamour reflecting the capacity of theatre itself to deceive and enchant, promising *merveilles* (*Médée*, 61). Amy Wygant describes the audience's fascination with Médée as 'narcissistic', referring to their complicity in her fantasy.[98] From Jason's opening recollection of Aeson's rejuvenation, through the spell she casts onstage to poison Creüse, to her departure in the customary flying chariot, Corneille's Médée appears almost exclusively in her incarnation as demonic sorceress. This incarnation owes much to Seneca (as well as to La Péruse).[99] The self-consciousness of the Senecan heroine resurfaces: *Je suis encore moy-mesme*, she declares (237), during an opening speech which follows *Medea* 1-55 with particular accuracy:

> Ouy tu vois en moy seule, et le fer, et la flamme,
> et la terre, et la mer, et l'Enfer, et les Cieux,
> Et le sceptre des Rois, et le foudre des Dieux (318-20).[100]

Her power over natural forces is reiterated by Nérine (714-20) and the recipe for her poison includes the Senecan ingredients of Hydra's blood, harpies' feathers, Meleager's brand and Phaethon's fire (998-1007; *Medea* 771-84). She adds deadly herbs:

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[97] Corneille argues thirty years later that only antiquity can license otherwise *invraisemblable* devices such as the dragon-drawn chariot. It should also be noted, however, that effects which were incompatible with later staging practices were still perfectly acceptable in the mid-1630s. *TD* 3, (1999), 139 in relation to *Médée*; see also pp64, 112-13, 127.

[98] Wygant (2007), esp. 127-41 identifies several aspects of a 'culture of narcissism' in *Medée*'s early modern audience, including a proto-consumerism based on susceptibility to illusion, a baroque delight in the free play of reflective surfaces, and 'a mechanics of exclusion from representation' attending the development of self-sufficient theatrical spectacle.

[99] Wygant (2007) attests to the likelihood of Corneille's access to La Péruse's version.

[100] ['Yes, you see just in me the iron and the flame, / the earth and the sea, Heaven and Hell, / power of kings and the thunderbolt of the gods.'] Compare Seneca, *Medea* 166-67.

Moy-mesme en les cueillant je fis paslir la Lune,

Quand les cheveux flottants, le bras et pied nu,

J'en despouillay jadis un climat inconnu (994-97).[101]

This combines Seneca's ominous account of Medea's midnight harvest (*illius alta nocte succisus frutex; / at huius ungue secta cantata seges*, 729-30) with the ritual in which *tibi more gentis vinculo solvens comam / secreta nudo nemora lustravi pede* (752-53). Recognition runs through the dialogue as much as it conditions the audience's response; Pollux warns Créon not to trust her, because *Je cognoy de Médée et l'esprit et les charmes*' (1146), and she mocks the despairing Jason by ordering him to '*lève les yeux perfides, et recognoy ce bras* (1571). Like Seneca's, Corneille's Médée defines herself against the history of the role she must perform.

Despite incorporating close translations of certain passages, Corneille - unlike his predecessors - also departs significantly from the Senecan version of events. He introduces a sub-plot in which Égée, having reacted violently to a broken engagement with Créuse, is rescued from prison by Médée and agrees to help her escape in return. Créuse herself also appears in several scenes, including Corneille's most outrageous departure not only from ancient models but from any trace of *bienséances*: the princess and her father both die onstage, writhing from the invisible sting of the poisoned robe in mutual agony that references *Hercules Oetaeus* throughout.[102] As if to compensate, Médée's children do not appear at all, and their offstage, almost offhand murder barely raises a ripple of contrition in

[101] ['I myself, in gathering these, made the moon turn pale, / when with unbound hair, bare arms and feet, / I once harvested them from unknown lands.']
[102] Compare *HO* 1218-78, in particular the reference to a 'scorpion' at 1218, repeated by Corneille at 1475.

either parent.[103] It is Créon and Créuse, in their ruthlessness and greed, who become the real targets of Médée's wrath.

Like *Hercule Mourant*, *Médée* employed the fluid scenography of *décor simultané*. Stage directions appearing in a number of early editions indicate a range of locations, including Égée's prison and a *grotte Magique* in which Médée prepares her potions. No ideological commitment to fixity had yet developed to prevent the play shifting from place to place, in accordance with Corneille's rather liberal interpretation of *unité de lieu* as accommodating anywhere in a given city.[104] The contemporary appetite for spectacle, stimulated by Médée's early reference to her *char bruslant* (260), was satisfied by the *machine* that lifted her from a balcony *en l'air dans un Char tiré par deux Dragons*. Far from disrupting an illusion of external reality, this version of the senecan began to approach a fusion of heightened text with phanstasmic imagery that celebrated the genius of theatrical artifice.[105]

## Conclusion

In the beginning – that is, in the closed circle of college communities – tragedy had been Senecan, and tragic delivery oratorical. When it transpired that open air-venues were less attuned to the technical subtleties of *actio*, being larger, noisier, and in all respects the antithesis of a hushed and candlelit hall,[106] French and English responses began to travel in parallel but opposite directions. French adaptors kept their Seneca, but altered the substance of the plays according to context: Garnier's exaggerations, Rotrou's romantic overtones, Pinelière's surveillance state. Between the *Médée* of La Péruse and the *Médée* of Corneille,

[103] It is possible that their bodies appear in the chariot, but there is nothing in the text to indicate this, and indeed Médée's pointed reference to *ce poignard que tu vois* (1573) suggests the contrary.
[104] Corneille, *Discours*, p150-51.
[105] On the popularity of *machine*-plays, see Roach (1985), 62. Deierkauf-Holsboer (1960), 60 attests that *Médée* (along with *Hercule Mourant*) was one of the decade's most stunning (*frappant*) productions.
[106] Gurr (2009), 118 & 142.

staging conventions evolved considerably, Corneille's version anticipating the resources of a permanent playhouse where *diatribe* could be supplemented by *décor*. English adaptors, meanwhile, retained the senecan aesthetic but staged no Seneca, continuing to graft selected tropes into plays whose overall style was drifting further and further from the excesses of *Locrine*. Seneca became one strand among the many that fed through Shakespeare and his contemporaries into the more self-conscious (and bloody) but less distinctively senecan revenge-tragedies of Middleton, Ford and Webster,[107] in which action, dialogue and *coups de théâtre* were already outstripping verbal strategies of affect. The *Tenne Tragedies* were the crucial turning point that transformed English Seneca from model rhetorician into public property, joining ballads, histories, moralities and novellas in the omnivorous gullet of Burbage's Theatre.

In France, the major shift from Seneca to senecanism occurred somewhat later than in England, resulting less from vernacular translations, which had been circulating relatively freely in performance since the 1550s, than from the consolidation of the playhouse as a cultural institution in the early seventeenth century. A greater dramaturgical gulf, in fact, separates Corneille's *Médée* from her successors than from the unregulated receptions of Seneca which preceded her. Médée has been identified as the first of Corneille's bifurcated protagonists, suspended (*suspendue*, 1354) between two passions;[108] she is also 'suspended' between two modes of staging tragedy: the baroque, with its love of beguilement and fantasy, and the approaching neoclassical, with its focused concentration on a single *noed* (knot). The following chapter addresses this crucial period in which the French neoclassical aesthetic was formulated, and senecan discourse adapted to fit the antechamber of a vaulted palace.

[107] E.g. *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, respectively.
[108] Stegmann (1973), 125.

## Chapter 4

## THE GREAT REPRESSION

It has not always been recognised just how radically the concept of mimesis was transformed between the takeover of the Bourgogne in 1629 and the establishment of the Comédie Française in 1680. Keen to establish their credentials in the fiercely contested territory of poetic codification, critics deferred to a body of overstated and sometimes entirely spurious dogma attributed to Aristotle and Horace. As the previous chapter showed, Seneca had considerable currency as a source for French drama prior to the 1630 watershed. From this point onwards, however, the increasing fetishisation of Aristotelian precepts engendered a more self-conscious engagement with antiquity. Neoclassical perfectionism, in pursuit of a stylistic ideal, began to promulgate a myth of theatrical origins that bypassed a corrupt Rome in order to identify with the purer concept of Attic Greece. Nevertheless, in practice, if not in pretensions, the senecan aesthetic had taken root in the developmental bedrock of dramatic expression, and continued to exert considerable influence.

Nowhere is this dynamic of appropriation and denial more apparent than in Racine's *Phèdre*. Both *Phaedra* and *Phèdre* are themselves thematically concerned with repression and containment, with taming the disorder that is threatened by the hereditary disease of passion. It is therefore an ironically exemplary play through which to examine the silencing of Seneca, as tragic form became progressively more restrictive in an attempt to regulate its audience's experience. Paradoxically, it becomes apparent that even as Seneca supplied French tragedy with a principle of latent destructive power, a new strain of dramatic theory was performing a similar act of sublimation on the senecan aesthetic itself: restricting, refining, restraining, with a view to ultimately increasing the power of tragic expression. As well as by the theoretical writing which began to circulate from the 1630s onwards, the neoclassical experience of theatre was equally determined by concurrent developments in

stage architecture and scenic arrangement. In particular, these responded to the demand that drama observe "unity of place", resulting in increasingly stringent restriction of what was permitted to pass before the audience's gaze. The sensory contradictions inherent in a primarily auditory theatre were no longer regarded as productive.

The first section of this chapter examines the constraints imposed on theatrical expression by the most influential texts of the neoclassical movement: D'Aubignac's *Pratique du Théâtre*, Chapelain's *Lettre sur la règle de vingt-quatre heures*, and Corneille's response in *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique*. The second section presents a reading of *Phaedra*/*Phèdre* that emphasises the play's ambivalent treatment of form, order and beauty, and its poetics of repression. The motif of the labyrinth, the uncharted domain beneath the royal palace where monstrous family secrets are incarcerated, can be regarded not only as a metaphor operating within *Phaedra*/*Phèdre* but as a metaphor for Racine's use of Senecan material:[1] to that which contemporary playwrights treated as unmentionable, Racine gives a voice. Overall, this chapter addresses the transition from drama conceptualised as a predominantly aural experience to drama conceptualised as predominantly visual, and identifies this paradigm shift as contributing to Seneca's decline in popularity. Racine's neoclassical rigour occupies a stage-space defined by language rather than spectacle, but at the same time skillfully accommodates the demands of representational theatre. Under the pressure of the so-called *Règles*, another aspect of the senecan aesthetic emerged: a capacity for compression, a responsiveness to restraint. Unlike Jacobethan theatre, played in a void whose identity is infinitely open to the spoken word, neoclassical theatre derives its power precisely from the conflict between verbal wanderlust and spatial fixity; as Parish comments,

[1] As recognized by Levitan (1989) and Bold (2001).

*cette réciprocité établit un rapport spéculaire entre les deux éléments, qui est fundamental à l'esthétique racinienne.*[2] It is equally fundamental to the senecan.

Tragedy regulated

In mid- to late-seventeenth-century tragedy, character began to supersede passion as the source of audience engagement. Dialogue trumped rhetoric, and language began to rank its communicative function above self-referential plasticity. As Hobson shows, 'a fundamentally different type of impression was to be created, one not of rapid oscillation between awareness and involvement but of absorption into the theatrical performance.'[3] This absorption was of a different order from that which characterised pre-baroque theatre. Progressively deprived of any continuity between stage and auditorium - for example, by the gradual elimination of spectators from the stage - [4] audiences had to find a new relationship with dramatic material, and this was achieved by an increasing emphasis on what was regarded as lifelike presentation. Reiss points out that illusionistic theatre is a rare phenomenon in historical and global terms,[5] but its abnormality is somewhat obfuscated by the attempts of its adherents to pin their innovations on the unresisting Ancients. Aristotle's *Poetics* acquired a cult status that far exceeded its content, the very paucity of its recommendations facilitating their elevation to unbreakable commandments.[6] In 1639, Jules de la Mesnardière wrote, *Quand je fais réflexion sur le peu de connaissance que j'ai acquis par l'étude, et que je vois luire sur moi les éclatantes lumières de ce miraculeux genie… alors certes je resscens une vénération*

[2] Parish (1991), 143.
[3] Hobson (1982), 147.
[4] Mittman (1984).
[5] Reiss (1971), 143.
[6] In arguing for the retention of Aristotelian principles in later drama, Dupont (2007), 84 understates the impact of his initial appropriation by French dramatic theory, glossing over it with the statement that *le théâtre en acte… l'ignore dans les faits… Tout se passe, de ce point de vue, comme dans les anciens théâtres grecs*.

*profonde pour ce prodige de science*.[7] Aristotle, of course, was the ancient *maître de la raison*, and so it is no surprise that in this decade so concerned with developing a rational science of poetry his work on the subject should be regarded as programmatic.[8] As René Bray notes, in fact, the Attic tragedians themselves contributed relatively little to this phase of the neoclassical movement: *Lorsqu'on établit les règles de ce genre, on s'addresse à Aristote plutôt qu'à Sophocle*.[9] Ancient works could be used as sources only insofar as they conformed (or could be made to conform) to the notions of purity, symmetry and propriety purveyed by the *Académie française* and its associates.

The *Académie* was founded in 1635 under the auspices of Cardinal Richelieu as a means of consolidating central authority through a program of cultural renewal.[10] Recognising its potential for ideological exploitation, Richelieu exercised his personal influence over the French theatre not via direct censorship but via a combination of patronage, subsidy and systematic criticism; for example, by commissioning d'Aubignac's *Pratique du théâtre*.[11] Drama needed to be sanitised into a medium fit for polite consumption, or what Couton calls *un divertissement honnête*.[12] Playwrights were encouraged to distance themselves from the indiscriminate, anarchic *imitatio* of the Garnier generation, choosing their sources as judiciously as their methods of adaptation. Good taste became a criterion. It is for this reason, as Tobin suggests, that Racine attributes his *Phèdre* not to Seneca but to the less accessible and more refined Euripides, performing an act of discriminatory self-

[7] ['When I reflect on the fraction of [Aristotle's] knowledge which this study represents, and when I bathe in the glow of the luminous brilliance of this miraculous genius, I feel again a deep veneration for this prodigy of knowledge.'] Quoted in Bray (1951), 54.
[8] On the cultural and intellectual climate: Toulmin (1990) and Greenberg (1992). On the rational approach to acting and the performer's body: Roach (1985), esp. 57-63..
[9] ['Insofar as the rules of the genre [tragedy] were established, they made reference to Aristotle rather than Sophocles.'] Bray (1951), 182.
[10] Levi (2000), 165: 'for the ability it would give the state to manipulate the personal and social values of France' and using the arts 'as instruments to manipulate educated opinion into a consciousness of national glory.'
[11] Couton (1986).
[12] Couton (1986), 14; Levi (2000), 161 uses the term 'sanitise' to describe Richelieu's reforms. Scherer 15-17 discusses the increased respectability of theatre and its political context.

fashioning to pose as both intellectual heavyweight (he knows his Greek) and as impeccable judge of literary merit (d'Aubignac would approve).[13] Furthermore, as Stephen Bold suggests, Racine's deliberate omission of Seneca from his preface represents 'the suppression of the aesthetic principle itself, grounded… in the work of "exciting the passions".'[14] In d'Aubignac's morally educative theatre, its ostensible aim to instruct (*instruire*) as much as to give pleasure (*plaire*), the sensual immersion produced by senecanism could no longer be enjoyed.

Along with Horace's didactic satire the *Ars Poetica*, Aristotle's *Poetics* provided the backbone of the neoclassical *Règles* of dramatic composition. Starting with Jean de la Taille in 1572, French theorists began to consolidate Aristotle's observations into a coherent system for explaining the Ancients' theatrical vitality and ensuring its transferral to the modern stage. Aristotle provided the concept of a coherent plot in which consistent characters suffer misfortunes that are plausible/*vraisemblable* (εἰκός) as well as possible (δυνατά), inducing catharsis through pity and fear (Arist. *Poet*. 1451b).[15] Vision is the privileged sense: implicitly for Aristotle, who distinguishes drama (δράματα) from other poetic genres in that it 'represents people acting' (μιμοῦνται δρῶντας) rather than reporting action;[16] and explicitly for Horace, who claims that,

> segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem
> quam quae sunt oculis subiecta fidelibus et quae
> ipse sibi tradit spectator (*AP*. 180-82).

[13] Tobin (1971), 162.
[14] Bold (2001), 419.
[15] This notoriously contested concept was addressed in more detail in Ch. 1.
[16] δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας (*Poetics* 1449b).

Horace then adds the somewhat contradictory caveat that no murders or transformations should happen onstage, because *quodcumque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi* (*AP*. 188). This prohibition also entered the neoclassical rule-book under the more general rubric of *bienséances*, or 'decency'.

It should be noted, however, that neither Horace nor Aristotle mentions *unité de lieu*, arguably the foundational principle of neoclassical staging. The only opinion on the subject of restriction comes from Aristotle, who comments that tragedy usually 'tries as much as possible to take place within a single revolution of the sun, or thereabouts' (*Poet*. 1449b), and that it requires a scope appropriate to its subject matter (1450b-1451a); epic can afford an infinite (ἀόριστος) time-scale, but tragedy concentrates on one discrete action. This handful of precepts formed the basis of neoclassical theory, which immediately came into conflict with the current theatrical practice whose form had developed from the humanist imitation of Seneca. Indeed, prior to Taille, the standard authority on dramatic poetry was Scaliger, who in his own *Poetics* of 1561 had extolled Seneca as a model above the Greek tragedians.[17] D'Aubignac, in contrast, advises applying oneself to '*la lecture de la* Poetique *d'Aristote* [unavailable in French translation until 1671, therefore requiring mediation by critics such as d'Aubignac himself] *et celle d'Horace*' (*Pratique* 1.5, p32). Playwrights had a duty to re-educate first themselves, then their public, in the "correct" nature and rules of dramatic art.

One of the most influential articulations of the aesthetic premises governing the *Règles* was Jean Chapelain's *Lettre sur la règle de vingt-quatre heures* (1630). Chapelain contends that the objective of theatre *consiste à proposer à l'esprit, pour le purger de ses passions déreglées, les objets comme vrais et comme présents* (p115). Anything which disrupts the spectator's 'belief' (*créance*, pp117 & 120) in the action represented is inimical to this cathartic effect, and action which lasts longer than twenty-four hours taxes the

[17] Bray (1951), 34-48 on Italian influence in France.

imagination. In countering the objection that epic poetry has an 'infinite capacity' and can represent many years and multiple events, Chapelain explains that epic has only to move the imagination aurally, whereas drama must also deceive the eye (*l'oeil… tromper*, p117).[18] It must therefore be plausible that the staged events could have occurred during the three hours the spectator has spent in the theatre, otherwise he will recognise their representation as false and therefore, according to Chapelain, be unable to purge himself of his analogous "passions". Chapelain's more pedantic suggestions (such as accounting for the missing twenty-one hours with intervals) do not undermine the overall logic of his argument, which reveals a fundamental shift in attitudes towards the inherent doubleness of performance. If the goal of theatre is catharsis, and if catharsis depends upon unbroken *vraisemblance*, then anything that draws the spectator's attention to theatrical artifice must be suppressed. This, then, is the point at which the basic rationale for rejecting the senecan aesthetic was first voiced.

The *Règles* were further refined and justified by the Abbé d'Aubignac in *La pratique du théâtre* (1657). Like Chapelain, D'Aubignac expresses a particular concern with protecting the viewer from any intrusive hitches in the continuity of his theatrical experience. D'Aubignac's emphasis on the visual is especially pertinent:

> Ce poème est nommé Drama, c'est à dire, Action, et non pas Récit; ceux qui le représentent se nomment Acteurs, et non pas Orateurs; ceux'là même qui s'y trouvent presens s'appellent Spectateurs ou Regardans, et non pas Auditeurs; Enfin le lieu qui sert à ses Representations, est dit Théâtre, et non pas Auditoire, c'est à dire, un lieu où

[18] All page references are to Chapelain (2007).

on regarde ce qui s'y fait, et non pas où l'on Ecoute ce qui s'y dit (*Pratique* 4.2, p282).[19]

It should be stressed that *vraisemblance* does not equate to realism. The events portrayed in tragic drama, d'Aubignac argues, should appear more 'elevated' than those in everyday life – hence the need for poetic discourse and polished delivery – so as to render the play a self-contained organism, wherein *le lieu représentant l'image d'un autre* (*Pratique* 1.7, p44). Actors should speak as if from elsewhere, as if treading the marble halls of ancient Rome rather than the splintery boards of the Bourgogne. D'Aubignac will admit no interruption of the action or place portrayed. "True" events require some stylisation to suit them to theatrical display, or they will paradoxically appear *invraisemblable*. *La Scène ne donne point les choses comme elles ont esté, mais comme elles devoient estre* (*Pratique* 2.1, p68)[20] is d'Aubignac's idealistic motivation for restricting theatrical space to that which can be seen in a single frame, rather than that which creates an all-encompassing aural sphere.

Corneille's response, his reformulation of the *Règles* from a practising dramatist's perspective, appeared in 1660 as *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique*. His revisions of these precepts are based on the premise that 'dramatic poetry has as its goal solely the pleasure of the spectators,' and guidelines derived from antiquity may be compromised in the interests of *utilité*.[21] Even ancient playwrights, as Corneille shows, rarely conform to such principles as catharsis - *une belle idée, qui n'ait jamais son effet dans la verité* (100) - and neither Aristotle nor Horace explicitly mentions the Unities of time and place so vital to

[19] ['The poem is called a Drama, that is to say, Action, and not a Recital; those who perform it are called Actors, not Orators; those who one finds present at the event are likewise called Spectators or Watchers, not Auditors; finally, the place where the Performances are held is called a Theatre, not an Auditorium – that is to say, a place where one watches what is done, and not where one Hears what is said.']

[20]['The stage does not at all show things as they are, but as they ought to be.'] See Lyons (1999), 83 & 116 for further discussion of *vraisemblance* as 'intersubjective'; also Wygant (2007), 122-23 on *vraisemblance* as a product of convention.

[21] Corneille, *Discours* pp65-66 & 99.

neoclassical theatre. In any case, Corneille recognises that what used to please the Athenians may not give equal pleasure to the modern French public whose taste it is the poet's job to satisfy. Corneille treats the *Règles* as pragmatic guidelines, not commandments. Discussing in depth such contradictions as "necessity" and "*vraisemblance*", or "*vraisemblance*" and historical "*verité*", he maintains the theoretical paradox while advising practical solutions: for example, if it is not *vraisemblable* for so much action to occur on a single day or in a single chamber, the dramatist should just conveniently neglect to mention the passage of time or changes of setting. One royal apartment, shrugs Corneille, looks very like another, and if no attention is drawn to it, they can comfortably occupy the same stage-space. The point is to avoid complicated set-changes, not slavishly comply with an abstract ideal.

As a dramatist, Corneille also did not break altogether with the representational techniques of pre-regulated tragedy. These include senecan elements such as the crowd-pleasing *tirade* and the supernatural instigator, evident in *Rodogune* (1645) and *Oedipe* (1659) respectively. *Rodogune* may be regarded as more melodrama than tragedy - the heroine marries her prince in the end while his villainous mother Cléopâtre chokes on her own poison - but its centripetal family romance draws, like *Oedipe*, on identifiably senecan traits. Watts points out that it is *une oeuvre d'une grande solemnité rhetorique… Corneille peut passer pour avoir "régressé" un peu vers un modèle "pré-cornélien" ou même "Renaissance"… Dans Rodogune, c'est la grandiloquence de la tragédie sénéquienne qui se répercute à travers la pièce.*[22] Cléopâtre, in particular, bears the stamp of senecan tragedy in her passionate soliloquies and mindless devotion to power. This megalomania, however, also marks her as a victim, intoxicated on autocracy to the point of destroying her own household, her own descendants. The play's primary agent acts under compulsion, carrying out a self-

[22] ['a work of great rhetorical solemnity… Corneille could be said to have regressed to a pre-Corneilian model, or perhaps a "Renaissance" one… In Rodogune, it is the grandiloquence of Senecan tragedy that recurs throughout the piece.'] Watts (1997), 40. See also Scherer (1984), 87, who comments that '*Ce qui est sacrifié à la puissance émotive, c'est souvent la vraisemblance*.'

destructive plot *sous la double motion de l'habitude et des passions*.[23] Fuelled by rhetoric, Cléopâtre displays the tyrannical mania of an Atreus or Eteocles, her stranglehold on royal power matched only by obsessive hatred of her young rival. *Qui se venge à demi court lui-même à sa peine* (*Rod*. 1523), she asserts, recalling Clytemnestra's justification so often repeated in Renaissance revenge tragedies, *per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter* (*Ag*. 115).[24] Her son Seleucus describes her malice as 'worthy of Megaera' (*fureurs dignes d'une Mégère*, 679), characterizing the queen as a diabolical personification of rage and revenge.[25] She resolves to outdo her former crimes, declaring that *Je fis beaucoup alors, et ferais encore plus* (470), an echo of *Medea* 904-10 that underlines her murderous intent towards her sons. Medea is the Senecan figure with whom Cléopâtre is most readily associated.[26] Like Medea, she faces Pyrrhic victory with perverse exultation:

> Par un coup de tonnerre il vaut mieux en sortir,
> Il vaut mieux mériter le sort le plus étrange:
> Tombe sur moi le Ciel, pourvu que je me venge,
> J'en recevrai le coup d'un visage remis,
> Il est doux de périr après ses ennemis (*Rod*. 1530-34).[27]

Inherited from Senecan forebears, Cléopâtre's fury seeps into the veins of her sons. Antiochus, like Phaedra, feels tainted by his mother's crime (713-24). He identifies himself to Rodogune first as his father's son, therefore worthy to be loved (1158-66); then later as his

[23] Bouvier (1997), 118. Bouvier's argument is that *habitus* is responsible for Cléopâtre's aberrant behaviour.
[24] Lucas (1922), 121 gives a complete list of occurrences.
[25] On Cléopâtre as diabolical or a personification of evil, see Watts (1997), 54-55. For Bouvier (1997), 117 it is Cléopâtre's obsession with *gloire* that drives her towards '*une noire incandescence, à une clarté obscure comme les flammes de l'enfer*.'
[26] Rohou (1997), 30; Bouvier (1997), 103; Scherer (1984), 88.
[27] ['Far better to die amid loud claps of thunder, / far better earn the most unheard-of fate. / Let high heaven crash so long as I'm avenged / … It's sweet to perish after all one's foes'] All translations of *Rodogune* are from Lockert (1952).

mother's (1181ff), worthy to be killed as a consequence of his inherited "blood". Senecan tragedy is populated by characters trapped in a bloodline: Oedipus, Phaedra, Atreus, Agamemnon, Eteocles, and *Octavia*'s pseudo-Senecan, quasi-historical Nero can all attribute the horrors they 'incubate' (*Phaed*. 99) to ancestral crimes or curses. It is not only blood which suffocates. Images of enclosure or suppression recur throughout *Rodogune*, culminating in the ultimatum, 'It is in this place that you must reign or die' (*C'est ici qu'il vous faut, ou régner, ou périr*, 818). Where Hardy's characters and Garnier's - like Seneca's - struggle against their blighted universe, Rodogune's world has shrunk to a town under siege. Phèdre's will shrink to a single chamber. The labyrinth scaled down is no less infinite, however, as it continues to draw the drama into the vortex of its ever-closer embrace. The perverted maternal nature of this confinement is spelled out by Seleucus, who rages that Cléopâtre 'smothers us, where once she has embraced' (*Nous ayant embrassés, elle nous assassine*, 740).[28] The queen's aging body, once a source of nourishment and nurture, has become for her sons a decaying prison as she crushes the younger generation into violent rebellion.[29] Like Laius' corpse that poisons the land of Thebes, Cléopâtre's all-consuming desire for revenge has pervaded and rotted her whole court. Pain which is suppressed, stiffened into immobility behind an enamelled crust of *bienséances*, is, as Antiochus comes to realise, most deadly (1121-26).

In 1659, Corneille returned to the substance of ancient myth with an adaptation of *Oedipe* that editor Bénédicte Louvat describes as 'resolutely modern'.[30] It is neither Sophoclean nor Senecan in form; Corneille introduces a sub-plot at once political and romantic in which Dirce, Laius' legitimate daughter, falls in love with Theseus, king of

[28] Compare Créon on the *frères* in *La Thébaide*: '*Il s'etouffent, Attale, en voulant s'embrasser'* (890) and also Néron in *Britannicus*: '*J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'etouffer*.' (1314).
[29] Stone (1987), 38 notes that in *Rodogune*, 'the maternal presence is monstrous'. An inability to escape maternal authority, and/or a desire to remain physically dependent, characterise Kristeva's psychoanalytic interpretation of abjection. On the association of the Mother's body with corruption, see Kristeva (1982), esp. 72-83.
[30] Louvat (1985), xv.

Athens, who until the truth is exposed is mistakenly suspected of being not only Laius' murderer but also his long-lost son. The most substantial Senecan passage retained by Corneille is the summoning of Laius' ghost in order to identify his murderer, an episode that does not occur in Sophocles. Invoked by Tiresias, Laius rises from his tomb:

> L'impérieux orgueil de son régard sévère
> Sur son visage pâle avait peint la colère
> Tout menaçait en elle, et des restes de sang
> Par un prodige affreux lui dégouttaient du flanc (*Oedipe* 597-602).[31]

Seneca's phantom appears in a similar condition, bloody and enraged (*Stetit per artus sanguine effuso horridus, / paedore foedo squalidam obtentus comam, / et ore rabido fatur*, *Oed*. 624-26). The failure of the Delphic oracle to elucidate their dilemma inspires Corneille's Theban dynasty to reopen the king's tomb, and to seek enlightenment from beneath the earth.

Entangled in language, Corneille's characters wind themselves into inescapable dilemmas, trapped by a highly regulated vocabulary and the insistent pulse of the alexandrine couplet. According to Cook, Corneille's couplets achieve their effect through their antithetical construction, each half balancing the other like a relentlessly insoluble equation.[32] Corneille's language leaves no space for prosaic reflection: *L'amour est pour les sens un si doux poison*, sighs Dirce, *qu'on ne peut pas toujours écouter la raison* (1255-56); at the same time, she is driven by an *impitoyable soif de gloire / dont aveugle et noble transport* (781).[33] Duty is a cage. Someone's life must be sacrificed to appease the thirsty dead, and Dirce spells

[31] ['The imperious pride of the haughty regard / that had coloured with anger his pallid face / looked on us menacingly; and the dregs of his blood / by some fearful power still leaked from his side.']
[32] Cook (1981), 84-93.
[33] ['Love is such sweet poison for the mind / that one can never listen to reason'; 'a pitiless thirst for glory, / which transports me blindly and nobly.]'

out the extremes constraining her: *si j'ay causé sa mort, puis-je vivre sans crime*? (644). Cause, death, life, crime: this is the linguistic mesh from which Corneille's characters are constructed, the speech which expresses and defines them. Although representing individuals rather than passions or moods,[34] these figures are still functions of discourse. Binding runs as a verbal leitmotiv through the play, along with blindness (*aveugle*) and cognates of *scavoir* (to know). Oedipus refers, for instance, to *les liens mal tissus* of his marriage to Jocaste (1627), while Theseus comments on the need to 'disentangle' (*desmeler*, 1218) the secrets hidden from them by the gods. Like the labyrinth, the twisted words of *Oedipus*' Sphinx are analogous to the discursive maze in which Corneille's characters are locked.

One can already see in Corneille, then, some of the senecan features which will obtain full activation in Racine. Pragmatically resistant to the adulation of the *Règles* that provided his contemporaries with a supposedly infallible template, Corneille continued to incorporate tropes derived from theatrical predecessors, including the now-unfashionable Seneca: Cléopâtre's *tirades*, Oedipus' necromancy. Even, as Stegmann suggests, the very quality of his characteristically riven protagonists owes its potency ultimately to *Médée*, Corneille's first initiation into classical tragedy, *entre deux passions suspendue* (1354).[35] French theatre, however, was now drawing inspiration from a different aspect of the senecan aesthetic. Instead of responding to its expressionist excesses, practitioners like Racine turned instead to the strategies of containment keeping them in check.

Passion and repression in *Phaedra*/*Phèdre*

Racine's *Phèdre*, despite professing to follow Euripides, has greater affinity with the arc of Seneca's plot. Racine appropriates several major structural points from Seneca, and two key scenes (2.5 and 5.6-5.7). From the outset, the Euripidean gods are absent. Euripides' Theseus

[34] Jondorf (1990), 36-45; 87-95.
[35] Stegmann (1973), 125

is merely visiting a local shrine, but *Phèdre*'s errant husband has departed indefinitely, and is presumed dead. As in Seneca, it is Thésée's "death" which sets in motion the chain of tragic events, and his own systematic infidelity which somewhat mitigates Phèdre's. Phèdre approaches Hippolyte directly, and re-enacts Seneca's seduction scene, most poignantly the speech in which she recognises her lost husband in his son. In an elegant twist on tradition which also excuses Hippolyte from otherwise unmotivated aggression, Racine has Phèdre demand his sword herself:

> Ce monstre affreux ne doit point t'échapper.
> Voilà mon coeur. C'est là que ta main doit frapper.
> […]
> Ou si d'un sang trop vil ta main serait trempée,
> Au défaut de ton bras prête-moi ton epée.
> Donne! (703-11).[36]

This enables Racine's sword, like Seneca's, to act as corroborating evidence for the false rape charge. The monster which attacks Hippolyte is more elaborate than Euripides' bull, resembling instead Seneca's *taurus biformis* (1172), dragon's tail and scaly flanks in horrible conjunction with a fleshy neck and horns. Hippolyte's bolting horses drag him, leaving his horrified entourage to follow the trail of blood across the rocks, through thorn-bushes fouled with flesh and hair (1556-58; compare Sen. *Phaed*. 1093-94, 1102-04). Unrecognizably disfigured (*un corps défiguré, / triste objet… que méconnaîtrait l'oeil même de son père*, 1568-70), he dies before any reconciliation with Thésée can occur. Finally, Phèdre herself confesses as she commits suicide onstage in the dying moments of the play.

[36] ['This frightful monster must not now escape. / Here is my heart. Here must the blow strike home ./ […] Or if you deem my blood too vile to stain / Your hand, lend me, if not your arm, your sword. / Give me it!'] (All translations of *Phèdre* are by Cairncross.)

Despite its obvious Senecan affiliations, Racine in his own preface to the *Phèdre* is careful to distance the work from Roman precedent and attribute it instead to classical Athens: 'I have borrowed the subject from Euripides,' Racine declares (*Le sujet est pris d'Euripide*). Affecting scrupulous adherence to other ancient sources - claiming fidelity, for instance, to 'the story of Theseus as recounted by Plutarch' (*l'histoire de Thésée telle qu'elle est dans Plutarque*) - Racine is unwilling to identify his play too closely with Seneca's. Greek tragedy in the Aristotelian abstract provides Racine's model. To illustrate his superiority over the ancients in observance of *bienséances*, Racine nevertheless quotes Phaedra's accusation in its Latin explicitness, choosing her direct statement *vim corpus tulit* (Sen. *Phaed*. 892) over Euripides' more circumspect posthumous letter (Eur. *Hipp*. 862-80). Seneca's Phaedra speaks, in Racine's prologue, voicing the charge which Racine takes such pains to reduce: his Hippolyte will be convicted only of an intention to rape, not the act itself. Despite this considerate mitigation, it is the pithy Senecan utterance which Racine retains; although held up as an example of the extremes his drama has denied, it betrays Racine's cleaving to *bienséances* as a deliberate rejection of alternative scenarios. Greek tragedy stands for model regularity, while Seneca stands as Other, representing obscenity. The Athenian theatre, according to Racine, 'was a school in which virtue was taught not less well than in the schools of the philosophers,' an institution which modern poets ought to emulate. While projecting perfection onto Attic Greece, Racine is able to reconcile the moral rectitude of classical theatre with the intolerable intimation of rape by displacing it to Rome: *vim corpus tulit*.[37] Latin bears the stain of sexual violence, and Seneca the fault. Superficially, Racine claims to be translating and even improving a Euripidean text, with the associated cachet of Greek cultural refinement, but even in the prologue he cannot avoid a glimpse of Latin corporeality, breaking the glittering surface like a shark's fin.

[37] Levitan (1989), 190 writes that 'the memory of his [Seneca's] text remains both in the preface and in the play itself, even if it is only as a memory to be suppressed, a presence to be shut out.'

Racine certainly departs from Seneca in various aspects of plot and thematic emphasis, most prominently by giving Hippolyte an alternative love interest, Aricie, which compromises his austere purity but also makes him a more conventional romantic hero. Racine therefore omits the Nutrix / Hippolytus debate on sexuality and urban corruption. He also has no chorus, resulting in fewer references to the spoiling of Hippolyte's unspoilt beauty. The appreciation of masculine form falls mainly to Aricie; before the Athenian princess discovers her desire is reciprocated, she discloses it:

> Non que par les yeux seuls lâchement enchantée
> J'aime en lui sa beauté, sa grâce tant vantée,
> Présents dont la nature a voulu l'honorer,
> Qu'il méprise lui-même, et qu'il semble ignorer.
> J'aime, je prise en lui de plus nobles richesses,
> Les vertus de son père, et non point les faiblesses.
> […]
> De porter la douleur dans une âme insensible,
> D'enchaîner un captif de ses fers étonné
> Contre un joug qui lui plaît vainement mutiné:
> C'est là que je veux, c'est là ce qui m'irrite. (437-53).[38]

Part of her attraction to Hippolyte is based on his apparent aloofness and immunity to passion. Aricie wants to stimulate a love imagined as pain and defeat, as a blow which breaches the defences of an individual still whole, still perfect, so far unscarred, like and yet

[38] ['Not that my eyes alone yield to the charm / of his much vaunted youth and handsomeness, / bestowed by nature, but which he disdains, / and seems not even to realize he owns. / I love and prize in him far nobler gifts - / his father's virtues, not his weaknesses. / […] / To cause an aching where no aching was, / to stun a conqueror with his defeat / in vain revolt against a yoke he loves, / *that* rouses my ambition, my desire.']

unlike his promiscuous father. Phèdre makes the same comparison. She loves in Hippolyte that aspect of Theseus which preceded his decline into playboy of the ancient world:

> Je l'aime, non point tel que l'ont vu les Enfers,
> Volage adorateur de mille objets divers,
> Qui va du dieu des morts déshonerer la couche,
> Mais fidèle, mais fier, et meme un peu farouche
> Charmant, jeune, traînant tous les coeurs après soi,
> Tel qu'on dépeint nos dieux, ou tel que je vous vois.
> Il avait votre port, vos yeux, votre langage.
> Cette noble pudeur colorait son visage. (635-42).[39]

As in Seneca, then, it is not just Hippolyte's youth and vigor which mark him as desirable. It is still his severe chastity, or at least his reputation for chastity (1106-13) which demands to be corrupted. Phèdre would lead him into the labyrinth, to stage a confrontation with the monster therein, to reproduce the past, to trace and retrace the same blind, winding, erroneous course. His beauty, however, resides in his innocence. It would not - it does not - survive exposure to adult sexuality.

It is unsurprising that philhellenist philosopher A.W. Schlegel identified Hippolytus with his own ideal of Classical masculinity.[40] *Forma* - form, beauty - pulses insistently through Seneca's *Phaedra*, a work of art which exhibits a reflexive and almost obsessive concern with the horrors dammed up behind perfect appearances. The second chorus focuses on Hippolytus' beauty, which is a curious blend of lyric fragility and heroic brawn: a

[39] ['I love King Theseus as once he was: / Not the fickle worshipper at countless shrines, / dishonouring the couch of Hades' god; / but constant, proud, and even a little shy; / enchanting, young, the darling of all hearts, / fair as the gods; or fair as you are now. / He had your eyes, your bearing, and your speech, / his face flushed with your noble modesty.']
[40] Schlegel, *Comparaison*, p43; further discussion in Ch. 6.

brilliant, short-lived flare of youthful radiance (*lucet; micat; fulgor… radiat*), it is compared to languishing lily-petals, dying roses, and verdant, virginal meadows ravished by heat-haze (*prata novo vere decentia / aestatis calidae despoliat vapor*, 764-65). His face could be clearer than Parian marble (*lucebit Pario marmore clarius*, 797) and his neck (*colla splendida*) outshine Apollo's, but he prefers the rugged outdoors and has instead developed muscles to rival Mars and Hercules. Flowing hair might suit effeminate gods like Bacchus, but Hippolytus' appeal arises from his thoroughly Roman virility: the stern expression (*facies torva viriliter*) and close-cropped fringe (*te frons hirta decet, te brevior coma / nulla lege iacens*, 803-04) recall Augustan *severitas* rather than Neronian flounce. Although characterised as object of pursuit and desire, Hippolytus displays no *mollitia*, no passivity. He remains rock-hard, unflinching as flint. Nevertheless, his adolescent fanaticism makes this hardness something brittle, a posture presented as attractive in its very unsustainability.

Beauty, the Chorus remind us, is a dubious blessing: *anceps forma bonum mortalibus, / exigui donum breve temporis* (761-62). One way or another, it must be compromised. Even if left untouched by lovesick or envious gods, it will eventually succumb to the passage of time:

> ut fulgor teneris qui radiat genis
> momento rapitur, nullaque non dies
> formosi spolium corporis abstulit.
> Res est forma fugax: quis sapiens bono
> confidat fragili? Dum licet, utere.
> Tempus te tacitum subruit, horaque
> semper praeterita deterior subit (770-76).

This apparent commonplace - *dum licet, utere* - acquires more complex overtones in a play which climaxes with the destruction of a beautiful figure. *Res est forma fugax* could be *Phaedra*'s motto. Form, like Hippolytus himself at 736 (*fugit insanae similis procellae*), not only slips inexorably away but actively turns fugitive, vanishing amid every effort to restrain it. The ominous *formosi spolium corporis* (772) foreshadows the terrible *spolia* that will return at the end of the play, Hippolytus' beauty reduced to component parts, deprived of the animate coherence which the chorus here reveal as a transient illusion. The loss of form, not its retention, should be regarded as a natural state, as even the *forma* which endures undamaged will eventually exhibit decay, ringmastering the sideshow of its own degradation: *deformis senii monstret imaginem* (823).

For the human subject to regard himself as possessing immutable corporeal integrity is an illusory perception sustained in the interests of stable social functioning and coherent personal identity.[41] In fact, as Kristeva recognizes in her discussion of abjection, the body is continually in flux, furnishing evidence of its susceptibility to decay by leaking and excreting substances which inspire revulsion and uncanny fascination, blood and faeces being the most highly charged.[42] Addressing the question, 'Why does corporeal waste… represent… the objective frailty of the symbolic order?', Kristeva concludes that it 'points to the infinitude of the body proper' and in this respect gestures towards the sublime as well as the grotesque.[43] The ultimate instance of abjection, for Kristeva, is the corpse, where the subject's alienation from his corporeal self reaches consummation; contact with corpses, and above all with dismemberment, therefore confronts the mother of all anxieties centred on the rebelliousness

[41] Grosz (1994), 84-86, 96.
[42] Kristeva (1982) follows the definition of dirt as "matter out of place" in Douglas (1966), but extends Douglas' anthropological study into psychoanalysis and literary theory. The "abject" is neither subject ("me") nor object ("not-me"), but refers to matter which is ab-jected – cast off – from the subject, yet still belongs to him. See also Bartsch (1997), 19-21 on the abject in Lucan.
[43] Kristeva (1982), 70; on sublimity, p108 It can also have an erotic charge for this reason: see pp55, 63, 107: 'the demoniacal – an inescapable, repulsive and yet nurtured abomination'.

of flesh.[44] For a reader or audience to encounter the body reduced to basic, visceral matter is thus a source of horror, because it exposes the ugly fact that *forma* is impermanent.

Racine concludes his *Phèdre* with the messenger's report, corroborated by Phèdre's confession as she swoons, poisoned. Seneca, however, provides the episode with a coda, an afterlife in which Hippolytus' *dispersa membra* (1246) are collected (*collegitur*, 1113) and reunited (*confertur,* 1114) into the semblance of a body. Theseus attempts to reconstruct it (*corpusque fingit*, 1265) out of pieces which are not only incomplete but unrecognisable (1260-68).[45] "Is this what beauty has come to?" he asks (*huc cecidit decor*, 1270). Such a scene is not unprecedented on the ancient stage – it appears that the lacunae riddling the end of Euripides' *Bacchae* cover up a similar reconstruction - but as the conclusion to a play so deeply concerned with physical perfection, it is doubly disturbing.[46] Theseus enumerates each of the body-parts he lays out, recognising hands and torso and facial features, but comes up against a formless object with no apparent place: *hoc quid est <u>forma carens</u> / et turpe, multo vulnere abruptum undique*? Lack of form, or lack of identifiable function, renders the substance suddenly ugly (*turpe*). Recognition, otherwise so important to Theseus' climactic confrontation with his own culpability (*crimen agnosco meum*, 1249) and his son's remains (*lateris agnosco notas*, 1260) is frustrated.[47] Like Phaedra in the preceding scene, Theseus has difficulty reconciling the pile of limbs at his feet with the individual they used to comprise. *Hippolytus hic est*? (1249) he asks. Is this Hippolytus? This scene not only raises philosophical questions about the source, retention and limits of human identity – *is* this Hippolytus? does this inert matter still constitute a man? how fragmented must a body be

[44] Kristeva (1982), 109 & 150.
[45] Bartsch (1997), 136 points out that '*fingere* is of course the task par excellence of the composing poet.'
[46] On the *Bacchae*, see Dodds (1960), 234; also Sandys (1900), 232. The most serious is the loss of approximately 50 lines between 1329 and 1330; their content has been conjectured based on references by 3rdC rhetorician Apsines, supplemented by lines quoted in the 12thC *Christus Patiens* compilation.
[47] On *anagnorisis* as part of the tragic / cathartic process, see Arist. *Poet.* 1452a.

before it is no longer analogous to a self? – but also raises metatheatrical questions about the meanings inscribed on Hippolytus' body, living and dead, in the context of live performance.

Various studies have identified instances in Neronian literature where physical form and literary form coincide, such as Lucan's self-destructive *Bellum Civile* where poetic language is mutilated to express the extreme mutilation of bodies.[48] As Glenn Most has shown, 'what happens to the bodies of the characters in Seneca's and Lucan's fictions corresponds to what happens to the bodies of these fictions as well.'[49] Seneca likewise compares his *De Ira* to the human anatomy, explaining that he must lay the muscular groundwork of his argument before coating it in a more attractive rhetorical membrane.[50] Corporeal analogies developed for prose and poetry can also be applied to live performance, a metaphor particularly relevant to *Phaedra*'s finale.[51] Surveying his son's body, Theseus refers to himself as *crudus et leti artifex, / exitia machinatus insolita effera* (1220-21), a craftsman similar to those who contrived mythologically-themed executions for an overstimulated Roman public.[52] Hippolytus' death corresponds to an eruption of biological imperatives; it explicitly eradicates his *ora pulchra* and his *decor*, finally impaling him *medium per inguen* (1099).[53] Reading Hippolytus as metonymic representative of the play that contains him has significant implications for interpreting its neoclassical reception.

[48] Bartsch (1997), Henderson (1987) and Masters (1992) relate the violence Lucan perpetrates on syntax and sense to the poem's savage depiction of civil war.
[49] Most (1992), 408. More generally, Most comments, 'Words for the body and parts of the body form an important part of the conceptual vocabulary with which the ancients analyse texts and parts of texts.' 407.
[50] *Debet autem in haec se demittere disputatio, ut ad illa quoque altiora possit exsurgere. Nam in corpore nostro ossa nervique et articuli, firmamenta totius et vitalia, minime speciosa visu, prius ordinantur, deinde haec, ex quibus omnis in faciem adspectumque decor est; post haec omnia, qui maxime oculos rapit, color ultimus perfecto iam corpore adfunditur* (*De Ira* 2.2).
[51] As Pratt (1983), 95 observes, 'there could be no more emphatic way of concluding a drama about the annihilation and fragmentation of human personality.' Boyle (1997), 112 also notes the metapoetic aspect of the reassembly scene.
[52] Coleman (1990).
[53] Segal (1986), 75 states, 'The bull that destroys Hippolytus is a distorted emanation of his own repressed sexuality, a monstrous projection of his own violent hatred of a part of himself.' Segal (1984) discusses the mutilation scene. Boyle (1987), 23 calls Hippolytus' death'a grotesque and unambiguous orgy of sexual violence.'

External form was of paramount importance to the neoclassical aesthetic; compliance with the *Règles* endowed a tragedy with a satisfying rhythm and a plausible evolution of events. Form constricts; indeed, it provides the resistance which enables madness to ferment. Harriet Stone, distinguishing between 'Tragedy' – 'a symmetrically perfect art form' – and 'the tragic', which she regards as the chaos contained by the form, relates this chaos to Kristeva's concept of the abject.[54] *Vraisemblance* imposes conformity to genre and structure, but this cell is also the chamber wherein tortured forces contend to the point of explosion. It provides the materials, linguistic and conceptual, from which to construct the alternative, tragic universe which operates at an uncanny tangent to our own. Although the *Règles* served the interests of decorum rather than beauty, their concern with sustaining the illusion of appearance nevertheless recalls the anxieties expressed in the *Phaedra* regarding the fallibility and corruptibility of form. It could be suggested that the neoclassical body could not be seen dismembered because this would provide too strong a reminder of a latent entropy temporarily arrested by language.

Language, in both *Phaedra* and *Phèdre*, operates paradoxically as an agent of concealment. *Effare aperte*! (*Phaed*. 640) Hippolytus entreats his stepmother, whose words have so far been tangled in ambiguity (*ambigua voce verba perplexa iacis*, 639). Theseus repeats the injunction at 859, again in response to *perplexa verba* that seem to be hiding some great matter (*magnum… nescioquid tegunt*, 858) under their rhetorical evasiveness. Open speech is impossible. Phaedra refuses to declare either her genuine affection or her specious charge of rape, mentioning Hippolytus only obliquely in her opening confession (98), and later relying on the sword to identify her attacker: *hic dicet ensis* (896). Instead, she develops a detailed rhetoric of forbidden desire, expressed in terms of Amazonian hunting (110-12; 394-403), Pasiphae's *fatale malum* (113-28), and volcanic heat (102-04; 641-44). When

[54] Stone (1987), 57 & 73; Kristeva (1982).

pressed, she articulates instead the impossibility of speaking out: *sed ora coeptis transitum verbis negant; / vis magna vocem mittit et maior tenet* […] *libet loqui pigetque* (602-03; 637). Segal has discussed *Phaedra*'s multiple spaces of containment and concealment, including the palace, the Labyrinth, the womb and the Underworld,[55] and this is a point to which I shall return when discussing Racine's structuring of theatrical space. For the present, however, it should be noted that speech itself functions in the *Phaedra* not as a communicative action but as a protective shield, piling heavy diction on top of unspeakable secrets. Burial and suppression prevail. The final word of the play, in fact, used previously by Phaedra of her own desire, is *incubet* (99, 1280).

Heaviness of diction refers to the abundance of metaphors, in particular hyperbolic metaphors, or other kinds of figured speech used to indicate indirectly the inward constitution of a character, such as Phaedra's comparison of her desire to a magma chamber (*Phaed*. 101-03) or a firestorm raging through her *intimas medullas* (*Phaed*. 641-42). It need not, however, imply that meaning is obscured, and nor need it imply insincerity. As Peter France argues, the dramatic advantage of Racinian hyperbole, an unexpectedly prominent feature of his style, is that it expresses most clearly *l'effet produit sur celui qui l'écoute… Elle transcende le contexte dramatique pour créer dans l'esprit du spectateur cette impression de grandeur*.[56] In other words, it bypasses the realism of commonplace utterance, thereby increasing the scope and sensory immediacy of the language applied to a given situation, producing a theatre not of representation but of sensation. Metaphor, as the next two chapters will explore in more detail, allows the auditor access at once visceral and oblique to otherwise inaccessible suffering.

As well as their linguistic bonds, Racine's characters struggle vainly to break the roles moulded around them by the oppression of precedent. The past, both mythological and

[55] Segal (1986), 29-39 on 'interiority' and 53-56 on 'heaviness' as recurring images in the play.
[56] France 1991, 30

literary, haunts their actions throughout. Phèdre identifies her affliction as resulting from Venus' ongoing persecution of her family, her *sang déplorable* (257-58); meanwhile, Théramène teases his master that *Pourriez-vous n'être plus ce superbe Hippolyte / implacable ennemi des amoreuses lois* (58-59).[57] It would be as unthinkable for Hippolyte to ride off into the sunset with Aricie in his arms as for Phèdre to resist the deadly imperatives of speech - the violence of her articulation, and the crushing paralysis of her muteness - which are the bearings that cause the play's whole world to wheel.[58] *Romper le silence*: this reiterated speech-act (occurring explicitly at lines 238, 526, 1450 and 1617), index of suppressed desire about to find a voice, becomes somewhat more than a metaphor.[59] The pivotal tension of Seneca's *Sed ora coeptis transitum verbis negant; / vis magna vocem mittit et maior tenet… Curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent* (603-07), or the repeatedly frustrated injunction *Effare aperte*! - Speak openly! - finds its equivalent in Racine's verbal (and, by extension, spatial) economy of concealment and exposure.[60]

Seneca's spatial axis opposes city to wilderness,[61] metaphors which Racine translates into their less richly associative but also more physically intimate correlatives of enclosure and escape. The action unfolds in *un lieu funeste et profane / où la vertu respire un air empoisonné* (1359-60). Phèdre feels the palace itself around her like a hostile force:

> Il me semble déjà que ces murs, que ces voûtes,
>
> vont prendre la parole, et prêts à m'accuser,

[57] Phaedra's assurance that *Paelicis careo metu* (Sen. *Phaed*. 243) receives an ironic rebuttal.
[58] This interplay between speech and silence also drives the plot of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Knox (1979), 206-16.
[59] So Phillips (1194), 56: '*Phèdre*… is a play above all about pronouncement… The whole structure of the play represents the transition from silence to language.' For Phillips, speech acts provide the foundation of Racinian tragedy: 'Speech in itself constitutes an event,' p69. This is in a sense a reformulation of d'Aubignac's catchphrase, *parler, c'est agir* (*Pratique*, 4.11).
[60] Padel (1990), *passim*; McAuley (1999), 51.
[61] e.g. *Phaed*. 483-557.

attendent mon époux pour le désabuser (854-56).[62]

Even the interior gives no refuge, as it is primed to spit out the secrets it contains, secrets silently imprinted on the walls themselves. The space gives tongue, surrounding Phèdre with evidence of her monstrosity. A similar sense of oppression rules in *Bajazet*'s seraglio, where Byzantine intrigues flourish in labyrinthine *détours*.[63] Racine, writing for a theatrical aesthetic which had absorbed and internalised the *Règles*,[64] treats unity of place not as an obstacle to be circumvented but as a device to be manipulated. Roland Barthes writes that 'The Racinian topography is convergent; everything leads to the tragic site, but everything is locked there. The tragic site is stupefied, caught between two fears, two hallucinations: that of extent and that of depth.'[65] Viala calls it *espace carcéral, microcosme où s'affrontent des forces tectoniques, et qui figure l'espace clos de la conscience*.[66] A number of twentieth-century directors have recognised and realised this potential in the set designs for productions of *Phèdre*.[67] Perhaps most outstanding among these is Jean-Louis Barrault, director of a landmark production in 1942 for which he produced extensive notes and commentary.[68] Barrault conceives of an atmosphere of stifling heat and silence, where even the shadows possess *des qualités chaudes*. 'One suffocates,' he writes, 'one stifles, in Troezen… Troezen is above all *un lieu irréspirable*.' This is a quality of place expressly designed to be represented by the actors, as an inability to breathe informs every movement, and every

[62] ['It already seems to me that these walls, these vaults / will acquire a voice, and ready to accuse me, / await my husband, to enlighten him.']
[63] McGowan (1982), 172-73 argues that 'place affects and infects the life of all the characters who are trapped in the enclosed and claustrophobic atmosphere of the seraglio… The Sultan's palace, its silence, its darkness and its winding ways mirror the secret, passionate and devious minds of its inhabitants.'
[64] Greenberg (1992), 143 notes 'the ease with which Racine functioned within the confines of Classicism's aesthetic parameters.'
[65] Barthes (1982), 174.
[66] 'Imprisoning space, wherein tectonic forces contend, and which figures the enclosed space of the conscience [or consciousness].' Viala (1997), 224.
[67] Vitez (1993), 55 & 57 describes how classical French drama plays out *les tréfonds de la psyché dans la violence du dire*; Lavelli (1993), 60-61 comments that the action occurs in *un contexte de huis clos* for which his company designed a machine-like set *qui fonctionne encore comme un étau*.
[68] Discussed in more detail in Ch. 8.

syllable. Not only breath is affected, either, but also what Barrault identifies as the other key feature of an actor's physiology, their spine: Troezen's oppressive atmosphere 'makes the air so thick you could lean on it' (*rend l'air suffisamment pesant pour que l'on puisse s'y adosser*). Enclosure also comes out in blocking, as Barrault's cast used the stage to trace well-worn personal routes to this central point imagined as *un lieu de recontre ménagé dans le labyrinthe*. At this crossroads, surrounded by listening walls, each action reverberates palpably in the swollen pocket of air.[69]

The architecture and atmosphere of the seventeenth-century French public playhouses should also be recognised as essential factors in the spatial dynamics of Racinian neoclassicism. Although the Bourgogne, where *Phèdre* was first staged, was a purpose-built venue, it suffered from the design flaws typical of contemporary theatres. The auditorium was rectangular, and the stage disproportionately deep and narrow, its width reduced even further by the spectators seated on both sides. At first on chairs, then on benches and finally in permanent boxes (*loges*), the rowdiest and most fashionable members of Paris society installed themselves in between the wing-flats until the stage became 'sometimes little more than an aisle between two hedgerows of overdressed dandies.'[70] Meanwhile, the sunken floor in front of the stage (*parterre*) was occupied by standing patrons for whom theatre was as much a social as an aesthetic occasion. The public, according to Lawrenson, 'arrived up to two hours beforehand, brawled, tippled, diced and wenched'.[71] Activity continued during performances, which could also be punctuated by audience members bantering and flirting with the cast, interactions which should not necessarily imply an unsuccessful performance, but on the contrary particularly vigorous engagement. Viala describes the theatre as *trop étroite et trop longue, contraire à une bonne acoustique. La visibilité y est limitée, le public*

[69] Barrault (1946), 36-38.
[70] Mittelman (1984), 109.
[71] Lawrenson (1986, 231; see also Mittelman (1984).

*trop serré, la chaleur étouffante, le manque d'hygiène flagrant.*[72] This, then, provided the working environment for neoclassical French tragedy. The austerity of its onstage space, and verbal invocation of offstage space, coexisted in continual, vigorous dialogue with the stimuli of a live auditorium.

Between the installation of Paris' first permanent theatre troupe at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1629, and the merger that established the Comedie Française in 1680, two divergent forms of *mise-en-scène* developed. One was the baroque extravagance of the Italianate *décor successif*, associated mainly with the court: its pageants, pastorals, ballets and spectacles made increasingly sophisticated use of illusionistic sets and special effects such as fire and flight.[73] The other form, the *palais à volonté*, became the ubiquitous counterpart to scripted neoclassical tragedy. Mittelman calls the *palais à volonté* 'imposing but indeterminate';[74] the columns on its backdrop and wing-flats suggested a courtyard or antechamber, suspended between the palace's private, unseen interior and the tantalising prospect of the external world, just visible as the *mer avec vaisseaux* receding to vanishing point beyond the painted marble.[75] Mahelot's entries for these sets are occasionally supplemented with a brief note such as the one for Racine's *Phèdre*: *Théâtre est un palais voûté. Une chaise pour commencer*.[76] The vaulted ceiling and the chair are referred to in the script, and therefore necessary stipulations.[77] The designs for many tragedies produced at the Bourgogne at this time required only a *palais à volonté*, perhaps distinguished by one or two significant features such as a throne, a portrait or a curtain. David Maskell points out that while Corneille's sets exploited the ambiguity of a neutral room, the precision with which

[72] ['too narrow and too long, inimical to a good acoustic. The visibility there was limited, the public too crowded, the heat stifling, the lack of hygiene flagrant.'] Viala (1997), 239. Wiles (2003), 215-16 and Scherer (1984), 15-16 also describe conditions in the Bourgogne and the Marais.
[73] Lawrenson (1986), 10 & 168; Deierkauf-Holsboer (1960), 60.
[74] Mittelman (1984), 110.
[75] Barthes (1982), 170-72 on the taxonomy of space and Lough (1979), 64-65 on backdrop decoration.
[76] ['Theatre is a vaulted palace. A chair, to start with.'] Mahelot (1920), 114.
[77] Modern director Christian Rist (1993), 22 maintains that all elements of the set should be *une surface de projection*, suggesting to spectators the places evoked by the text. This accords with D'Aubignac (1996), 54.

Racine defines the scenic space of his tragedies prompts an implicit dialogue between the visible location of the action and the speech occurring within it.[78] Similarly, Richard Parish points to the productive tension created by hypothetical or contrary-to-fact propositions – such as Phèdre's fantasy of encountering Hippolyte in the labyrinth – and the implacable *fixité de lieu* in which they are uttered.[79] In part, this fixity or specificity is itself also a linguistic construction. *Phèdre*'s *palais voûté* is supplemented by a good deal of mythonomastic detail that gives it a secure foothold in ancient Greece: Miverva raised its city walls (360), its sea was named for Icarus (14), Thésée is detained in Epirus (958, 978) and Phèdre takes poison obtained from Medea (1637-38). These references both maintain *vraisemblance* by using antiquity to license supernatural events, and also endow a minimal set with mythological enhancement.

With so much depending on verbal content, it is not surprising that considerable importance was attached to the way in which it was vocalized. It is possible that less than perfect acoustics contributed to the Bourgogne's trademark delivery of tragic discourse - sonorous, semi-chanted, and ridiculed by Molière - but this delivery was defended as deliberate by Racine: *Il voulait qu'on donnât aux vers un certain son qui, joint à la mesure et aux rimes, se distingue de la prose*.[80] A century later, Diderot still maintained that drama, particularly verse drama, needed specialist delivery.[81] Racine, according to Claude Abraham, trained his actors in what he regarded as appropriate vocal technique *pour leur transmettre*

[78] Maskell (1991b). For an elaboration, see Maskell (1991a). Along with Phillips (1994), however, I disagree with Maskell's approach. Maskell sets out to recover "real" theatrical action ('true theatrical territory', p185), i.e. gestural / mimetic action, from the scripted text. For Phillips, on the other hand, speech acts themselves constitute action or violence: 'The physical dimension in Racine is primarily the voice.' Phillips (1994), 143.
[79] Parish (1991).
[80] 'He wanted the verses to be given a certain sound which, in conjunction with the meter and rhymes, would distinguish it from prose.' Quoted in Lough (1979), 19 along with some examples of Molière's derision. On the Bourgogne's acoustics see also Viala (1997), 164.
[81] ['*Croyez-vous que les scènes de Corneille, de Racine, de Voltaire, même de Shakespeare, puissent se débiter avec votre voix de conversation et le ton du coin de votre âtre… Les choses familières de Corneille ne peuvent pas même se dire d'un ton familier*.'] Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* [1883]. (Trans. Pollock)

*ses pouvoirs quasi-magiques de déclamation et d'élocution*.[82] It may also be the case that this timbre had been bequeathed by the company housed in the Bourgogne prior to its designation as a public theatre space, the troupe d'Adrien Talmy, whose resident playwright was Alexandre Hardy. T.J. Reiss writes of Hardy's work that 'the notion of the cage of fate, the labyrinth, formulated as a prophecy, takes its shape from the language rising up in a solid mass… [and was] aided probably by the psalmodic chant which appears to have been the normal mode of stage declamation for tragedy in the period'.[83] If this quality endured throughout the seventeenth century, supported by the opinion that heightened verse needs corresponding vocal stylization to move its audience, it may be regarded as another aspect of the senecan aesthetic which survived regulatory purging.

When considering the spatial attributes of neoclassical tragedy, the labyrinth, receptacle of Pasiphae's disgrace and symbol of Phaedra's buried shame, appears as a key image. During her seduction of Hippolytus, Seneca's Phaedra proposes that had he accompanied Theseus to Crete, *tibi fila potius nostra nevisset soror* (662). Racine's heroine goes much further; having initially suggested that *ma soeur du fil fatal eût armé votre main* ('my sister would have armed *your* hand with the fatal thread', *Phèd*. 652) she decisively snaps the link to her source-text in order to wind her stepson further into the fantasy she has spun: *Mais non* - she declares. *C'est moi, prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours / Vous eût du labyrinthe enseigné les détours* (655-56). Phèdre supplants Ariadne's thread with her own body, a substitution that takes an undeniable turn for the erotic when she finally discloses that she *au labyrinthe avec vous descendue / se serait avec vous retrouvée ou perdue* (661-62). Phèdre's fate now rests with Hippolyte. The haunting repetition of *avec vous… avec vous* binds them irrevocably, like a vow or a curse. The descent has been completed, and Phèdre laid open to the stark alternatives branching out from this moment: to be redeemed, or to be

[82] Abraham (1991), 38.
[83] Reiss (1971), 34.

lost. The passage answers to Seneca's labyrinth, and enlarges it. Stephen Bold would place this speech at the centre of Racine's play, arguing that its labyrinthine approach to the desired, forbidden object parallels Racine's own approach to Seneca, the classical model he desires but is forbidden by *bienséances* to acknowledge.[84]

As Segal has shown,[85] Seneca constructs a network of images centred on the labyrinth and the Minotaur, living emblem of Pasiphae's disgrace and the taint of sexual deviance in Phaedra's bloodline. According to the Nutrix, any progeny resulting from Phaedra's incestuous relationship would share the Minotaur's deformity (*Cur monstra cessant? aula cur fratris vacat*? (174); Hippolytus likewise compares Phaedra's confession of long-concealed love to the Minotaur's birth, the emergence of an infant marked by *biformi… nota* as testament to Pasiphae's 'contamination' (690-93). Phaedra herself does not give birth. Instead, it is the sea, heavily pregnant (*gravis*) with something deep in its *onerato sinu*, which issues the half-bull that destroys Hippolytus, despite his attempt to emulate a father whose most famous *labor* is killing bulls (1067). Phaedra also returns to the labyrinth to account for Hippolytus' death, asking:

> membra quis saevus Sinis
> aut quis Procrustes sparsit aut quis Cresius,
> Daedalea vasto claustra mugitu replens,
> taurus biformis ore cornigero ferox
> divulsit? (1170-73 ).

Buried monstrosity resurfaces, and causes mutilation. In *Phèdre*, the monstrous remains, incarnate now in Racine's characters themselves. Phèdre attracts the epithet *monstre* twice,

[84] Bold (2001), esp. 430. Levitan (1989), draws a similar parallel, this time identifying 'Senecanism' as the monster Racine's neoclassical decorum struggles – perhaps unsuccessfully? – to overcome.
[85] Segal (1986).

once in describing her own crime (701) and once when Aricie alludes to her obliquely (1444-46); Hippolyte, too, is called *monstre*, once by a jealous Phèdre (884) and once by his father (1045). Thesée, in his role as an almost Herculean monster-killer, purges Greece of terrors in a massacre that included a *Crète fumant du sang du Minotaure* (79-82), juxtaposed ironically to the monstrosity evident in his own home. Having destroyed the Minotaur, he entered the clan of the labyrinth himself by installing 'the daughter of Minos and Pasiphae' (36) in the sanctuary/prison of his *palais voûté*.[86]

Above all, Phèdre desires concealment: silence to hide her love and her guilt, darkness or enclosure to hide her person. *Je meurs, pour ne point faire un aveu si funeste*, she tells Oenone ('I would die rather than make such a deadly declaration', 226); she has decreed that no-one is to speak Hippolyte's name in her presence (603-04), and has been hiding herself, 'fleeing the light' (*cachais au jour*, 1242). After rejection, she begs, 'Hide me (*cache-moi*) away completely. I have said too much. / My frenzy has dared to expose itself openly. / I have spoken something nobody should ever have heard.' (740-42). Able to address Theseus only in cryptic half-truths, she tells him that *Je ne dois désormais songer qu'à me cacher* (920). Concealment, however, may be no safer than revelation. *Phèdre*'s tragedy results from a series of mistimed disclosures - the premature announcement of Theseus' death, Phèdre's advances to Hippolyte, Theseus' unwitting exposure of Aricie to Phèdre – but it results just as much from mistimed silences: Aricie and Hippolyte fail to defend themselves, and Phèdre recoils from the brink of a lifesaving confession (1201-02).[87]

The precedent for oppression goes back to a former generation. When Phèdre recalls what happened to her mother, Oenone exhorts her to forget, and allow that *un silence éternel*

[86] On the motif of the monster, see Levitan (1989), and Delcroix (1991); on recurring vocabulary generally in *Phèdre*, see Phillips (1982).

[87] On *Phèdre* specifically, Cook (1981), 47 comments that 'exposure relentlessly leads to further exposure'. As Phillips (1994), 35-36 puts it more generally: 'Failure to speak is thus as much of an event as speaking… Racinian characters are vulnerable through their speech. Speaking or failing to speak is what eventually undoes them.' Knox (1979) reads the mistimed decisions in Euripides' version as representing the futility of human action in the tragic universe.

*cache ce souvenir* (251-52). The past, however, will not stay buried, but remains as a corrosive 'hidden sickness' (146) eating into the present. *Phèdre*'s drama depends on the Senecan dynamic of containment and release, the loaded spring, the explosive concentration of pain in an enclosed space. Thésée, desperate to escape the consequences of his curse, cannot conceive of anywhere far enough from the scene. *De l'univers entier je voudrais me bannir*! he cries (1608), echoing another guilty Senecan father (*Hercules Furens* 1321-41) in his expansion of personal culpability into a global stain. He remains trapped, however, in Racinian stage-space, a self-contained bubble of nightmare proportions, a labyrinth in which every turn leads back to the same remorseless chamber, face to face with the faceless monster he has made.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown what happened to senecanism when subjected to neoclassical regulation. From 1637 onwards, the application of the *Règles*, and particularly the interdependent concepts of *vraisemblance* and *unité de lieu*, brought about a remarkable shift in Senecan performance transmission. This shift had both the disabling effect of excluding much senecan material as inappropriate or – perhaps worse – *invraisemblable*; but at the same time had the altogether enabling effect of making its hitherto latent features, such as volatile compression and formal musicality,[88] central to Racinian poetics. It is worth reiterating at this point why the rationale behind *unité de lieu* proved, in the end, to be such a major factor in squeezing the senecan aesthetic offstage. To be ethically moved by a piece of theatre, contemporary critics contended, the public must believe in the validity of the action represented; its *vraisemblance*, therefore, must not be disrupted by visible changes of scene. Credibility entailed the convergence of aural and visual data. Previously, the spatial liberty of

[88] Abraham (1991) on Racinian musicality.

a bare platform or the split focus *of décor simultané* enabled the imagination to follow the spoken text uninhibited. For Racine, as Parish has shown, the very specificity of the scenic *chambre* became a resource to play off against the magnitude of the unattainable world beyond.[89] Meanwhile, however, the expectation of visual concordance had already taken the first step towards a proto-naturalism that would flourish in the eighteenth century, moving away from Seneca's primarily aural domain.

[89] Parish (1991); Maskell (1991b).

## Chapter 5

## HYPERTRAGEDY

English Restoration tragedy, especially the work of popular playwright Nathaniel Lee, retains profound senecan elements. In Seneca, as in Lee, figured language such as hyperbole is frequently applied to internal sensation in order that the microcosm of human pain might stand in for the macrocosm of universal catastrophe. Both media might usefully be termed "hypertragedy",[1] and indeed have attracted the same criticisms of inflation or overload because of their departure from a conventional scale of representation. This is the point at which the upper-case *Senecan* – direct and deliberate contact with the ancient material – is almost entirely overtaken by the lower-case *senecan*, tropes so heavily mediated they cannot securely be called allusion, but which apply the same formulae to stimulate similar theatrical effects.

Most studies of Restoration drama concentrate on gender, politics or gender politics.[2] This is scarcely a disproportionate focus, given the prominence afforded these sociocultural issues within the plays themselves, but it has also left literary questions relatively open.[3] Although Nathaniel Lee has been recognised as an 'outstanding creative figure' and one of the Restoration's 'major tragic dramatists,' his work has yet to be the subject of a complete monograph.[4] Seneca's influence on Jacobethan tragedy has been extensively debated,[5] but scant attention has been paid to the ways in which post-Interregnum dramatists adapted, refashioned and reactivated those fragments of Seneca which remained congenial to their radically different conditions of performance. The episode of political upheaval known as the

[1] The equivalent German term *Hypertragödie* has been used to describe Heinrich von Kleist's *Penthesilea*. Hermand (1995), 43.
[2] For example Brown (1981), Canfield (1985), Diamond (1989), King (1992), Payne (1995), Owen (1996), Hayne (1996), Hughes (1996), Johnson (2000), Kewes (2001), Reilly (2009), Chernaik (2010).
[3] Exceptions include Parsons (1972), Powell (1984), Kerrigan (2001) and Murray (2001).
[4] Parsons 1972, 27 and Brown 1981, 70, respectively.
[5] The debate began with Eliot (1951) [1927a] and [1927b] and Cunliffe (1929), continued through the vehement mid-century denials of Hunter (1974) and Baldwin (1959), and now is swinging back into Seneca's favour with Miola (2002) and Norland (2009). See further discussion in Chapters 2 & 3.

Exclusion Crisis (1678-81) precipitated a particularly pronounced (re)turn to the senecan: John Crowne's *Thyestes*, Ravenscroft's *Titus Andronicus* (another Thyestean concoction) and the Dryden/Lee *Oedipus* were all staged during this period. Lee also composed *The Massacre of Paris,* banned due to its strident anti-Catholicism, and the *Massacre*'s somewhat less inflammatory replacement, *Caesar Borgia*. Although the senecan aesthetic experienced a brief revival, however, it was subject to factors in the development of theatrical production which made it increasingly marginal. A single playwright does not make a movement, of course, and nor is this intended as a study in individual authorship, but the fact remains that it was largely Lee's work which was responsible for bringing senecan tragedy to the Restoration stage in considerable and hitherto unrecognised quantities.

'Neronian Gambols'

His first play, *Nero* (1674) establishes Lee as not only familiar with the Senecan corpus but as beginning to develop his own version of the senecan discursive mode. Like the *Octavia* from which it takes its point of departure, the text is a patchwork of Senecan references and keywords. Executing his mother in the opening scene, Nero is established from the outset as an incestuous 'Monster' (1.1.115, 142-43), 'o'er-charged with excess' (1.2.111), and – in his own estimation, at least – more powerful than the gods: 'I ransack Nature,' he boasts, 'all its treasures view; / Beings annihilate, and make anew' (1.2.40-41). The Herculean extent of his absolute power is accompanied by a determination to surpass even these extremes: 'On, Nero, on,' he urges himself (I.139), applying this translation of the typical Senecan *pergam*! or *perge*! (*Thy*. 890-92; *Med*. 987; cf. Clytemnestra's *nequitiam incita*, *Ag*. 114) to the *nescioquid* of desire: 'pleasures so rich, so various, and so new / As never yet the Gods, my great forefathers, knew' (1.2.146-47). Driven by this cocktail of megalomania and lust, Lee's Nero is also subjected to supernatural pressure. The ghost of his criminal ancestor Caligula

rises ‘from the Infernal cave, the wide, the low Abyss’ to provide the emperor’s actions with a further motivating cause. It remains ambiguous as to whether Caligula represents a symptom of Nero’s own diseased psyche, or a personification of the congenital frenzy afflicting *Nero*’s Julio-Claudian dynasty, or a genuine mechanism for situating the play’s events within a wider metaphysical frame. Caligula hails from a senecan Hades, rather than a Christian Hell, and compels Nero to ‘Act thou, what can’t be done by me’ (4.4.20), making this ruler, like Thyestes and his descendants, the instrument of passions that are not his own. Compulsion, as in Seneca’s *Phaedra* or *Agamemnon*, is as much a bodily as a psychological force. Caligula’s shade injects his victim’s ‘Vitals’ with ‘the scum of Lethe, Alecto’s gall, / Maegera’s sweat’ (4.4.23-24), again eliding infernal influence with internal predisposition.[6] Not simply goaded by Furies from without, Nero is driven by this hellish compound from within. Like Seneca’s protagonists, he becomes as much a victim of hereditary corruption as a culpable agent.

As Caligula departs, Nero awakens tormented beyond speech, asserting that ‘the forked tongues of Furies can’t express / The rage that burns within me’ (33-34) and resorting to a barrage of senecan *adynata* (compare for instance *Med*. 401-14) to show the extent of his ‘fury’ (43). Immediately, a messenger enters to announce that a mob of citizens have set fire to the imperial palace. ‘Fire I’ll revenge with fire,’ declares Nero; ‘Rome, the world’s metropolis, will burn,’ and ‘Bright Ruin… swallow all’ (56-58). This impulse towards cataclysm and the universalising language recalls Medea once again (*Med*. 414, 424-25, 427-29). Fire becomes the objective correlative not only of Nero’s rage, but of the poison he has administered to Britannicus, whose agony opens the following scene: ‘Fire, fire, I’m all one flame, fly, my friends, fly / Or I shall blast you; O my breath is brimstone, / My lungs are sulphur, my hot brains boil o’er’ (5.1.13). Fire in the city manifests onstage as fire in the

[6] Comparable to Seneca’s *Phaedra*, where it is ambiguous as to whether Phaedra is responsible for her own uncontrollable desire or under the influence of an all-powerful Venus. Armistead (1979), 63 calls Caligula a ‘post-Senecan’ feature.

body, as though the hell supposedly visited upon Nero has likewise infected his brother. We do not see Rome in flames; instead, we hear Britannicus burning up. Dramatically, Lee effects an enactment of Caligula's incendiary curse made all the more potent by concentrating it into a single figure rather than diffusing it through spectacle.

In his role as Nero's tutor, Seneca may have been put to death, but his sentiments remain.[7] Britannicus, for instance, enters reading a book in which he encounters the following philosophical speculation: 'Whither, o whither, go we, when we dye? / Why, there where babes not yet conceiv'd do lie; / Death's nothing; nothing after death will fall; / Time, and dark Chaos, will devour us all' (4.3.19-22). Britannicus is reading the second chorus of Seneca's *Troades*: *Post mortem nihil est, ipsaque mors nihil, /… tempus nos avidum devorat et Chaos… Quaeris quo iaceas post obitum loco? / Quo non nata iacent* (*Tro.* 397; 400; 407-08). As in the *Troades*, this view of the soul's posthumous dissolution is contradicted by the presence of interventionist ghosts (to counterbalance the diabolical Caligula, Britannicus is visited by his murdered beloved Cyara). Other Senecan correspondences include Agrippina's unanswered prayer, 'Where are thy dreadful bolts (to Jove I call)? / Strike him, or me, amiss they cannot fall' (1.1.144); Medea attacks Jason's responsibility for her crimes with a similar prayer to Jupiter: *Nunc summe toto Iuppiter caelo tona, / … vel me vel istum: quisquis e nobis cadet / nocens peribit; non potest in nos tuum / errare fulmen* (*Med*. 531-37; cf. *Thy*. 1085-88). Britannicus adapts another Senecan expression to his own circumstances, wishing like *Thyestes*' Nuntius (*Thy*. 623-24) that 'Some whirl-wind snatch me headlong through the Ayr' (4.1.13) when overcome by news of Cyara's death.

As well as specific quotations, *Nero* also employs the senecan technique of using highly figured language to seduce or wound, or to construct a fictional environment from purely verbal materials. Nero's delusions of god-like grandeur and Britannicus' articulate

[7] It is not clear whether Lee regarded Seneca *Tragicus* and Seneca *Philosophus* as the same person.

mania provide ample opportunity for vivid *enargeia* (3.1.96-104 and 3.3.16-22), as does Petronius' Mephistophilean seduction of Poppaea (3.2), couched in words described by the eavesdropping Piso as 'pestilent, the blasting issue / Of a corrupted heart, diseas'd, and deadly' (3.2.55-60). The speaker's ability to inflame his audience has been an index of oratorical success since antiquity;[8] here, however, inflammation results explicitly from contagion. Rather than healing or soothing as a *pharmakon*, speech causes mortal sickness, wreaking havoc on the body it invades. Like Nero suffering the verbally-constituted attack of Caligula's ghost, Poppaea is helpless before the 'blasting issue' of breath strung with irresistible nuggets of sound. Bodies, in Lee's Neronian court, are figured as passive, vulnerable objects; language, meanwhile, is deployed like a biological weapon.

Lee's familiarity with the Senecan corpus is therefore evident right from the beginning of his career, but his plays with the exception of *Oedipus* are insufficiently similar to be called adaptations or even reworkings. Instead, what they involve is the application of senecan representational strategies to new situations. In *Nero*, for instance, the verbal effusion which Seneca uses to increase the magnitude of unspeakable *scelera* is often used in an erotic context, in order to magnify the implications of desire while simultaneously veiling the literal sex-act. Although simulated murder may now be staged gratuitously, simulated sex remains an obscenity.[9] Lee's *Nero* was dedicated to what he later called 'the wild, unthinking, dissolute Age; an Age whose Business is senseless Riot, Neronian Gambols, and ridiculous Debauchery.'[10]

[8] It remained so well into the eighteenth century. De Bolla (1989) quotes from Sheridan's *Rhetorical Grammar of the English Language*: 'True eloquence does not wait for cool approbation. Like irresistible beauty, it transports, it ravishes, it commands the admiration of all who are within its reach... The hearer finds himself unable to resist it... His passions are no longer his own. The orator has taken possession of them; and with superior power, works them to whatever he pleases.'

[9] Senecan *scelera* often – but not invariably – refer to sexual transgressions such as Phaedra's, Clytemnestra's and Jason's. On Restoration visual dynamics see Diamond (1989). Hayne (1996), 344 notes in regard to the opening scene of Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus* that 'sexual intercourse [is] perhaps an ideal example of a phenomenon which cannot be adequately contained in language.'

[10] Lee, Preface to *The Rival Queens*.

In its almost playful re-application of senecan dramaturgy, *Nero* might usefully be compared to another contemporary hypertragedy, Elkanah Settle's *The Empress of Morocco* (1673). Settle evokes the senecan as a studied, metatheatrical discourse falser than the performance in which it is embedded. Two senecan moments stand out in the *Empress*, both staged by the archetypally arch-villainous Queen Mother, whose plots generate the action. Like Phaedra, she conceals adultery with an accusation of sexual assault, using a sword to incriminate her victim and artfully refusing, under interrogation, to be explicit: 'Let my tears and blushes speak the rest,' she demurs, prevaricating until Muly Hamet exclaims: 'This mystick Language does my sense confound!' (*Ambigua voce verba perplexa iacis*, *Phaed.* 639-40; cf. 858-59). The king entreats her to elucidate the 'riddling history', whereupon she gives way with apparent reluctance: 'Well, since you will force my Tongue…' Settle's Queen Mother dissembles Phaedra's self-protective silence while deliberately fabricating evidence against Hamet. Continuing her pursuit of the throne, she deceives the innocent Morena into stabbing the king at the conclusion of a court masque. Morena, the Queen Mother asserts, has gone mad, and describes her madness in senecan detail:

> Strait with a more than common rage inflam'd,
> She mov'd - star'd - walk'd - storm'd - rag'd - curst - rav'd and damn'd
> With a distorted look she tore her hair -
> Unsheathed her dagger and gave wounds to th'air -
> Her face disclos'd grew to a deep red,
> As if her looks presaged that blood she shed.
> Then with an infant rage, more soft and mild,
> She plaid with madness, leap'd, danc'd, sung and smil'd (4.3).

This is based on typical passages such as the Nurse's description of Medea raving; note in particular the strings of asyndeton, in addition to the 'more than common rage' which provokes Medea to outdo even her own crimes of passion:

> recursat huc et huc motu effero,
> furoris ore signa lymphati gerens.
> Flammata facies, spiritum ex alto citat,
> proclamat, oculos uberi fletu rigat.
> Renidet; omnis specimen affectus capit.
> Haeret, minatur, aestuat, queritur, gemit (Sen. *Med*. 385-90).

Unlike Medea, however, Morena has done no such thing. The words are completely false, unsubstantiated by any corroborative enactment, and yet they carry such plausibility, such dramatic authority, that they exercise effectual force. In Settle's hands, senecan tropes become pure metatheatre, devices to offset the surrounding artifice.

The *Empress* ends by opening the shutters on a graphic scene of torture.[11] Although comparably gruesome, tableaux such as this in fact owe much less to Seneca than to the English revenge tragedies of the previous generation, many of which were rewritten and remounted in Restoration mode.[12] One of the crucial resources available to the modern indoor playhouses at Drury Lane, Dorset Garden and Lincoln's Inn Fields, all constructed in the early 1660s, was the inner stage, or the "scene". This device was instrumental in transforming the tragic climax from an essentially auditory experience – the messenger-speech, the *récit* or *tirade* – to a visual display, and as such became the emblematic result of an overall shift in

[11] The script suggests that only the usurper Crimalhaz is put to death, but the scene is illustrated in contemporary editions with multiple bodies.
[12] Discussed by Kerrigan (2001).

aesthetic practice.[13] The inner stage supplanted the senecan method of stimulating audience response through heightened language alone, translating theatrical horror into an alternative sensory medium. In the Restoration playhouse, most of the action was still performed on the apron, the platform which projected out in front of the proscenium arch, flanked by the audience on three sides in boxes and in the pit. When required, however, the painted shutters behind this platform could be drawn back to reveal either a hidden interior (such as a boudoir or a torture chamber) or a mechanised spectacle (such as the 'Prodigies' in *Oedipus*).[14] In the *Empress,* then rather than using a monologue to immobilise his audience in the cumulative bonds of auditory torture, Settle administers it in a single, shocking, visual strike.

In 1677, Nathaniel Lee premiered what became his biggest hit, *The Rival Queens, or the Death of Alexander the Great*. In Senecan terms, this play contains two notable elements: the comparison of vengeful Queen Roxana to Medea, and the vocabulary used by Alexander to describe the poison ravaging his body as he dies. Upon discovering Alexander's infidelity, Roxana rages that 'eternal discord, / Fury, revenge, disdain, and indignation / Tear my swol'n breast, make way for fire and tempest' (3.1 49-51). Conspirator Poliperchon encourages her, urging, 'Let not Medea's dreadful vengeance stand / A pattern more, but draw your own so fierce, / It may forever be original' (3.1.66-68). Roxana recalls what she has sacrificed for Alexander and concludes that even if revenge should destroy her, 'I will rebound to my own Orb of fire, / And with the wrack of all the Heav'ns expire' (126-27). The conspirators admire her passion, Cassander commenting that 'Now you appear your self' (129). Roxana, like Seneca's Medea, fulfils her identity in the pursuit of Pyrrhic vengeance on a treacherous

[13] Although visual *coups de théâtre* were not uncommon in Jacobethan theatre – Tamburlaine's 'pampered jades of Asia,' for instance, or Giovanni brandishing Annabella's heart in Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore* - these do not make the same use of the dynamics of suspenseful concealment and climactic disclosure as encoded in both the *récit* and the inner scene, which corresponds in many ways to the Greek *ekkyklema* (on which correspondence, see Hall & Macintosh (2005), 18; on the spatial dynamics of enclosure / disclosure in tragedy generally see Padel 1990 and Rehm 2002).

[14] On the semiotic significance of scenes, see Diamond (1989) and Powell (1984), 42-43 & 57; on the mechanics see Visser (1980), 73-77.

spouse.[15] Alexander's (pseudo-) Senecan template, meanwhile, is the demigod Hercules *Oetaeus*, implicitly refracted through Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*.[16] This identification becomes especially acute when the poisoned Alexander, unable to identify his assailant, demands that his attendants 'Search there, nay probe me, search my wounded veins. / Pull, draw it out,' imagining that 'a forked burning Arrow / Sticks cross my shoulders' sending 'Lightning through my flesh, my blood, my marrow' (5.313-17). Although not quite as graphic as Hercules, he nevertheless expresses his 'Torments' with excruciating verbal precision rather than the inarticulate cries that an altogether mimetic theatre would demand.[17] 'My vital spirits are quite parched, burnt up,' he is able to relate, 'And all my smoaky Entrails turn'd to ashes' (5.356-57; compare *HO* 1218-23 & 1277-78). Citing Hercules at this juncture endows Alexander with superhuman stature, and provides Lee with the means for articulating superhuman death.

Horror plays of the Exclusion Crisis

In 1678, as the Exclusion Crisis gathered momentum, Lee collaborated with John Dryden on a version of *Oedipus*, staged in a successful season at Dorset Garden. This most overtly Senecan of Lee's works was deeply embedded in the political anxieties surrounding its production. Lee has been called 'a master of politicized horror,'[18] a mastery which could partially be attributed to his immersion in Seneca's own dramatizations of self-destructive power. Charles II lacked a legitimate heir, placing his brother James – openly Catholic – next in line for the English throne. A parliamentary bill would be proposed in 1679 to exclude James from the succession altogether on the grounds of religious unsuitability. Charles

[15] The lines indicating this progression are: *Medea – fiam* (171); *Nunc aude, incipe / quidquid potest Medea, quidquid non potest* (566-67); *Medea nunc sum*, (910); *coniugam agnoscis tuam? / sic fugere soleo* (1021-22).
[16] On the Herculean aspects of Tamburlaine, see Waith (1962), 60-87.
[17] On the problems of representing pain (and solutions thereto) see Martin & Allard (2009), 3 and Budelmann (2007).
[18] Marsden (2000), 179.

refused to accept Parliament's recommendation, resulting in stalemate. Susan Owen remarks that 'the Exclusion Crisis was a crisis of fatherhood': it resulted, in other words, from the failure of Charles II to father a successor, a failure which resurrected anxieties concerning parricide on a national scale.[19] The Exclusion Bill received its greatest impetus from the so-called 'Popish Plot' to assassinate the king, which erupted late in 1678. The Plot itself was later revealed to have been a fabrication, but the ensuing deluge of denunciations, high-profile arrests and public hysteria needed little in the way of hard evidence to sustain it.[20] Charles maintained a fine line, overseeing investigations into the Plot while turning a blind eye to the possibility that his own favoured successor might be implicated. Battigelli sums up the paradox succinctly, pointing out that 'No ritual could satisfactorily expunge Catholicism from the nation without also jettisoning the Stuarts'.[21] It was during this turbulent period that the Dryden/Lee *Oedipus* performed its own intervention into popular perceptions of repression and regicide.

Raising Laius' ghost for questioning is an unequivocally Senecan scene. Additionally, Dryden and Lee draw on Seneca's depiction of the Theban plague in their depiction of a stricken urban setting, recalling London's own outbreak of plague in the preceding decade. The play opens, like Seneca's, with a detailed description of the plague, beginning 'No Sun to cheer us, but a Bloody Globe / that rowls above; a bald and Beamless Fire; / His face o'ergrown with Scurf; The Sun's sick too' (1.1.5-7). Like Seneca's, Lee's plague afflicts the entire landscape of Thebes, its livestock, and its seasons, until even the 'Universal Frame' seems ready to collapse (1.1.1-2), and its unambiguous source is Oedipus. 'There stands your plague,' declares Alcander. 'The ruin, desolation, of this unhappy -' (4.1.140-41). Oedipus himself later recognises that he has been brought 'to blast with his dark breath / The yet untainted earth… To raise new plagues' (4.1.574-76). Theban pestilence is the result of

[19] Owen (1996), 202.
[20] For more details regarding the Exclusion Crisis, see Johnson (2000), 14-21; Owen (1996), *passim*.
[21] Battigelli (2012), 6.

'Blood! And a king's blood too; / And such a king, and by his subjects shed.' (1.1.437-38).[22] Dryden and Lee's treatment is delicate, however, in that their *Oedipus* admits no straightforward allegory (apart from the caricature of Whig demagogue Lord Shaftesbury as a Machiavellian Creon).[23] Oedipus' guilt, as John Kerrigan points out, is predicated on his legitimacy, and his right to rule is inherited, however tainted the acquisition, from his father.[24] Whatever Charles' flaws as a monarch, the responsibility for regicide/parricide lay with the Parliamentary republicans – long since absolved in the amnesty of 1660 – and now with the extremists who threatened to destabilize the settlement and drag the country back into civil war. Dryden and Lee made their observations more general: the body of a murdered king lay rotting without restitution, his vindictive legacy poisoning the polity. Wilful ignorance could only temporarily contain it, and now as the cracks split open into serious ruptures it became necessary to expose the familiar, buried horrors in order to confront them, whatever the consequences.

Laius' ghost etches the Dryden/Lee *Oedipus* firmly into the Senecan tradition. Characteristically for the period, and following Cornelian precedent, the ghost's manifestation is enacted rather than narrated (it also makes Hamlet-esque reappearances later in the play). The necromancy, as in Seneca (*Oed*. 530-58), is performed in a *locus horridus* described by Haemon as a grove watered by sacrificial blood in which the trees are 'All full of human Souls; That cleave their barks / To dance at midnight by the moon's pale beams' (3.1.207-08). Tiresias presides over a lengthy ritual which includes slaughtering a barren black heifer, a detail which may be derived from Seneca's *atrae boves* (*Oed*. 556) and

[22] According to Owen (1996), 207-08, *Oedipus* has 'a clear royalist message… Vitiated kingship is better than rebellion.'
[23] Creon is generally recognised as Shaftesbury: Battigelli (2012), 14; Kerrigan (2001), 240; Hall & Macintosh (2005), 27.
[24] Kerrigan (2001), 242; on other aspects of the connection between Charles and Oedipus, see Battigelli (2012) in particular, but also Johnson (2000), Kewes (2001) and Hall & Macintosh (2005).

perhaps recalls in addition his infamous sacrificial set-piece (*Oed*. 353-83).[25] The musical interlude that follows, for which Purcell's 1692 setting is extant, has been interpreted by Battigelli as creating a serene heterotopia wherein 'the lyrics and the music effect the cathartic power of tragedy.'[26] It was not, however, an innovation of Dryden's, but rather shares its position and incongruity of tone with the equally incongruous "Bacchus Ode" which separates Seneca's heifer-sacrifice from the summoning of Laius.[27] While Seneca relies on lavish narration alone to establish the eerie setting and perversion of natural order, Dryden and Lee cut the lights ('*The stage wholly darkened*,' 292), punctuating the blackout with thunderclaps and flashes of lightning during which '*Ghosts are seen passing betwixt the trees*' (329). Finally, Laius rises '*arm'd in his chariot as he was slain*' (344) to name his murderer, a much more regal apparition than the mangled corpse who speaks through Seneca's Creon (*Oed*. 624-26). Like other Senecan spectres, he prefers the Underworld to the hell that is Thebes, and begs Tiresias to send him back. When entreated to identify his murderer, he unequivocally names Oedipus as parricide, incestuous monster, and source of Thebes' plague (compare Sen. *Oed*. 634-41). He departs commanding those present to 'forbid him Earth, and I'll forbid him Heaven' (3.1.377), a translation of Seneca's equally pithy *eripite terras, auferam caelum pater* (*Oed*. 658).

As in Lee's *Nero*, language in *Oedipus* is attributed the ability to harm, to heal, and not merely to represent but to make active interventions into the physical world.[28] Implicitly, senecan dramatic speech accomplishes similar transformations, carving out the environment in which it occurs as well as determining the figures who utter it. Whereas mimetic drama treats words as the instruments wielded by individuals against the backdrop of a given situation, senecan drama furnishes no situation other than that which evolves through speech,

[25] The heifer in Seneca is emphatically *innupta*, although she is carrying a displaced and malformed foetus, described as a *nefas* omen (Sen. *Oed*. 373).
[26] Battigelli (2012), 21-23.
[27] Boyle (2011), lxxxv interprets Seneca's Bacchus ode as a metatheatrical device.
[28] Hayne (1996) discusses the political implications of this; on the aesthetic implications, see Powell (1972).

sweeping the helpless carriers of this discursive disease into its undertow. Language does not stand apart from senecan matter; they are melded, co-dependent. When Lee's Jocasta realises the truth and warns her husband/son to probe the evidence no further, she configures the trauma of disclosure as a wound:

> Could there be made a monstrous gap in nature,
> A flaw made through the centre, by some god,
> Through which the groans of ghosts may strike thy ears,
> They will not wound thee as this story will (4.1.425-28).

She wishes to be transported on a whirlwind to a barren, uninhabited island where she 'may have vent / For horrors that would blast the barbarous world' (4.1.378-83). Neither human bodies nor nature itself can withstand what Jocasta is now capable of uttering aloud. The "flaw", the "monstrous gap" opened up to admit voices that ought to have been silenced, allows passage to cosmic disorder and the uncanny unrest of the dead; the dead, of course, have already had their say. Combined here with the materiality of language, this therefore produces an original synthesis of senecan elements.[29] Jocasta's sonic, psychic 'wound' is not wrought as the logical consequence of penetration by a weapon; rather, it answers sympathetically to the colossal 'vent' in the fabric of Nature itself, dark sign of absence filled with the howl of a vacuum. Hole echoes hole, void void; the gap cries out and recalls the wounds of a murdered king which, as in *Richard III*, 'open their congeal'd mouths and bleed afresh' (1.2.230), just as Laius' own wounds ache in proximity to Oedipus (D&L 3.1.371-73). The effectiveness of this passage depends on its queer proliferation of gaps: the breach through which an open, groaning mouth inflicts an open, bleeding wound. Jocasta,

[29] One way or another, the Underworld has an onstage presence in most of Seneca's plays, whether in the form of an apparition (*Agamemnon*, *Thyestes* and reported in *Oedipus* and *Troades*), or a return from Hades (*Hercules Furens*, *Phaedra*).

summoned by a 'hollow' and unheard spectral voice, exits to 'cleave the ground' with her own insubstantial expiration (4.1.429 & 436).

Upon discovering his identity, Dryden and Lee's Oedipus chooses the Senecan method of tearing his eyes out with his hands rather than the Sophoclean brooch-pin, but there the resemblance ends. The play concludes with the death of every major character, including Oedipus himself. A 1726 commentator remarked on this scene that 'Oedipus makes a beautiful Harangue, which he concludes, comically, by throwing himself out of the window… Nevertheless, it is not the actor that represents Oedipus, who throws himself out of the window; but a Man of paste-board, made like him, which is thrown down… The People usually laugh very heartily.'[30] Whether laughter attended the 1678 production is uncertain, but as a cathartic response to the orgy of mutual stabbing that precedes Oedipus' decisive plummet onto the royal flush of corpses, it may not be altogether inappropriate. This comprehensive annihilation exceeds anything in Sophocles, Seneca or Corneille. In striving for a senecan goal - the representation of extreme sensation, or hypertragedy - Lee utilises both the senecan technique of exaggerated speech and the visual effects newly available to Restoration playwrights.

In 1680, two years after the Dryden/Lee *Oedipus*, John Crowne's *Thyestes* opened at Drury Lane, and became the first translation of a fully Senecan play to be produced on the English stage, although paradoxically less invested than Lee's oeuvre in preserving senecanism. Crowne fleshes out the plot considerably, adding a doomed romance between Atreus' daughter Antigone and Thyestes' son Plisthenes. Crowne's conflict has a different focus from Seneca's, revolving around Atreus' innocent wife Aerope. Raped by Thyestes and harshly punished for adultery by her husband, she is aghast at the brothers' apparent reconciliation and adds to the Act V bloodshed by stabbing Thyestes herself. Plisthenes is

[30] This is an anonymous scholion to Muralt's *Letters*, quoted in Visser 1980, 86.

murdered onstage by a band of perfidious priests, but his flesh is not served at the banquet; instead, his body is revealed intact for Antigone to swoon over, while Thyestes swallows a symbolic cup of blood.[31] Despite these alterations, much that is Senecan remains. Crowne translates a number of key lines directly, notably the Fury's description of perverted Nature (104-21), Atreus' comparison of himself to an eager hunting dog (496-503), the uncanny refusal of Thyestes' garland to stay in place and the inexplicable horror that rises in his breast (944-57, 1001). Calling on the gods to avenge his son's death with a thunderbolt, Thyestes entreats them to 'take not aim, but dart it at us both; / Hit one of us, and 'tis no matter which' (compare *lumen ereptum polo / fulminibus exple. Causa, ne dubites diu, / utriusque mala sit* (1086-88). Atreus vows to do 'I know not what, / Something that all the gods will tremble at,' which combines *fiat hoc, fiat nefas / quod, di, timetis* (265-66) and *haud quid sit scio, / sed grande quiddam est*! (269-70). On a thematic level, the senecan motif of over-consumption likewise runs through Crowne, culminating in the 'infinite excess' which Atreus orders to overflow (4.1). This is complemented by the motif of an internal Hell, a body which contains evil not controlled by its host, and intersects with the metatheatrical self-referentiality that is such a pronounced senecan trait when Atreus asks himself (aside),[32]

> What crowd is this assembled in my Breast?
> My soul's a Theatre with Furies fill'd.
> The Ghastly throng fling all their eager looks
> Upon a Table spread with mangled Limbs
> And smoking bowls o'er gorg'd with reeked blood;
> Their Eyes grow larger with the pleasing sight;
> […]

[31] Crébillon's 1707 *Thyeste* makes the same changes.
[32] On Senecan metatheatricality see for example Boyle (1997), Schiesaro (2003).

The vision takes! The Story's great and brave!

I'le give it my Revenge to Copy out.

An audience avid for 'mangled limbs' will in fact leave Crowne's table unsatisfied, but the confusion of exterior and interior accomplished here destabilises notions of somatic coherence as effectively as the spectacle of cannibalism. As Atreus turns to address the 'crowd' assembled before him, his 'Vision' casts them momentarily as Furies, the theatre assimilated to his own breast.[33] Later, Thyestes locates his meal in his 'breast' and 'bowels' interchangeably, indicating a lack of distinction between the politely figurative space and the grossly physical. In issuing Atreus' words, the actor's breast, where soul transpires as breath, produces a single cavernous interior capable of swallowing offspring, containing Hell, and engulfing the very theatre itself.

The third member of the triad of 'Senecan horror plays' to accompany the Exclusion Crisis was Ravenscroft's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.[34] Although related to Seneca only by the loosest of structural and thematic parallels, it deserves examination for precisely this reason, as it illustrates important differences between Restoration and Elizabethan theatre. Contemporary playwright Thomas Shadwell was of the opinion that 'Women and Scenes' were the most advantageous theatrical devices of the period, and Ravenscroft makes use of both.[35] Whereas Elizabethan cross-dressing produced instant dissociation between the speech of "Lavinia" and the body of the boy-actor who played her, making his suffering a rhetorical illusion and gender a part of his skill-set, the Restoration actress's body was implicated inextricably in her utterances. The boy-actor, in a sense, could

[33] The Restoration auditorium was often better lit than the stage. Powell (1984), 15: 'In the light from the candles that gild the auditorium, a curiously close relationship is established between the audience and the dramatic event.'

[34] Canfield 1985, 236 lists *Thyestes* and *Titus* along with two translations of *Troades*: Sherburne (1679) and Talbot (1686). Marsden (2000), 175 identifies a 'cult of horror popular in the late 1670s' but does not mention Seneca.

[35] Shadwell quoted in Diamond (1989), 522.

only ever refer to his character in the third person, but the actress could – and did – use herself as a referent.[36] Femininity could be visually authenticated as well as merely symbolised. Exploiting the actress as erotic object, Ravenscroft lingers on her desirability as Chiron and Demetrius prepare to 'rifle all her secrets' (Ravenscroft 3.1.137): her trembling, her tenderness, and the maidenly pallor that Demetrius would rather see 'glow with lust and appetite' (3.1.141). The casual brutality of their Shakespearean attack is here overlaid with lecherous banter, complemented by Lavinia's later appearance, which sets her horrific injuries against the sexually provocative 'Loose hair, and Garments disorder'd.'[37] The eroticization of feminine distress has little senecan currency,[38] but became a key motif of Exclusion tragedy, especially in conjunction with abuses of royal power.[39] In his preface, Ravenscroft explains that *Titus* suited the season of the Popish Plot as it 'shew'd the Treachery of Villains, and the Mischiefs carry'd on by Perjury'. Furthermore, he undertook to improve upon what he calls Shakespeare's 'most incorrect and indigested piece'. His revisions remove most references to Ovid, thus cutting Lavinia off from the powerful mythological dimension that would otherwise increase the stature of her persona beyond the merely personal. Ravenscroft constructs an altogether more cultivated Rome,[40] but peels back this veneer of civilization with the play's concluding bloodbath, making particular use of his other theatrical resource, the inner scene. In a show-stopping, heart-stopping tableau like those in *The Empress of Morocco* and *The Massacre of Paris*,[41] the scene is drawn to reveal the arch-villain Aaron, 'discover'd on a Rack.' 'Disjoynt his limbs,' orders Titus (5.2.141).

[36] King (1992), esp. 81. On the actress's dual identity as subject and object, see also Payne (1995).
[37] Reilly (2009), esp. 139-43 and Diamond (1989), 535 on the fetishisation of the actress in a state of "undress".
[38] One exception is the parodos of *Troades*, analysed by Benton (2002).
[39] Classic examples include Otway's *Venice Preserved* and Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus*; discussion in Canfield (1985) and Kewes (2001).
[40] Tamora claims to have been enticed not to a 'barren, detested vale' (*TA* 2.2.93-97) but merely to a 'secret and retir'd place' (Ravenscroft 3.1.102) in the palace gardens; Bassianus' corpse does not tumble into a grotesquely womb-like pit fringed with bloody brambles (*TA* 2.2.198-202; 2.2.339-40), but is rather more appropriately concealed in a vault (3.1.203-04).
[41] See Iwanisziw (2009), 112-14, 122-24 on public executions as spectacle and the torture illustrated in the *Empress.*

The tortured body of Aaron and the ravished body of Lavinia, then, provide visual assurance that the text's inflated rhetoric retains a firm collateral of flesh.[42]

Continuing to exploit the vogue for hypertragedy, Nathaniel Lee imagined Seneca's *Hercules Furens* performed as late antique court entertainment in his *Theodosius, or the force of love* (1680). Varenes reminds his old friend Theodosius of how they once played Hercules and Theseus in amateur theatricals:

> When on the stage to the admiring court
> We strove to represent Alcides' fury
> In all that raging heat and pomp of madness
> With which the stately Seneca adorned him;
> So lively drawn, and painted with such horror
> That we were forc'd to give it o'er, so loud
> The virgins shrieked, so fast they dy'd away (1.1.257-63).

This brief metatheatrical digression shows Lee's fascination with the Roman tragedian surviving his engagement with other material. Not only specifying Seneca's Hercules instead of the more classical Euripides, Lee also refers to him in terms of approbation which suggest why he treats Seneca as the 'Ancient' most worth imitating. The Seneca in this passage is at once 'stately' and thrilling, his Hercules 'adorned' with baroque flourishes – Lee's own work has been described in similar terms - [43] and elevated rather than degraded by his awe-inspiring 'pomp of madness'. Fury, horror, and 'raging heat' at the same time make such an electrifying impression, and the figure of the stricken hero so vivid – 'lively drawn' – that the response from Varenes' audience of virgins is both agonized and orgasmic: to 'die', of

[42] As a useful comparison, Hayne (1996) discusses the contemporary mistrust of unsubstantiated discourse as played out in Lee's *Lucius Junius Brutus*.
[43] Grayham (1931), 69.

course, rarely escapes sexual connotations in Restoration drama. Seneca's Hercules, all-powerful and all-consumed, is singled out to represent a theatrical ideal. Here, however, it is not compact classical restraint but rather all-out classical passion which is held up as the essence of ancient drama, not to mention as a certain desideratum: what Restoration actor, and what Restoration playwright, would find unflattering the tribute of a virgin audience yielding ecstatically to their manipulation, shrieking aloud and losing consciousness under the waves of pleasure and pain?

The sensory appeal of Lee's dramatic mode, according to one contemporary source, resembled that of music. In a rather backhanded assessment, Colley Cibber records, 'In what Raptures have I seen an audience at his [Lee's] furious Fustian and turgid Rants… When those flowing numbers come from the mouth of a Betterton, the Multitude no more desired sense to them than… in the celebrated Airs of an Italian Opera.'[44] Character and plot make minimal contribution to inducing the 'Raptures' Cibber derides. Rather, it is to Lee's arias, those bursts of high emotion set to streams of evocative language, that the audience respond. Lee's diction offers little respite from intensive figuration, creating the senecan atmosphere of oppression and hysteria by constantly sculpting experience into hyperbolic shapes that give it the protean cast of nightmare.

Lee's *Massacre of Paris* (composed 1679) was so violently anti-Catholic that it had to be banned for a decade and could only be staged in safety once an impeccably Protestant regime had come to power. The playwright had spent the last five years of that decade incarcerated in Bedlam, declaring the whole world mad apart from himself.[45] By 1689, however, sanity prevailed sufficiently for Lee to be released and for his psychotic senecan hypertragedy to be performed. Throughout the subsequent century, it would be revived

[44] Cibber, *Apology*, quoted in Grayham (1931), 68. On the musicality of Restoration delivery, see further Parsons (1972), 35.
[45] 'They called me mad, I called them mad, and damn them, they outvoted me.' Quoted in Porter (2002), 88.

whenever the English public were feeling particularly patriotic.[46] The characters in *Massacre* are defined by their obsessions.[47] Margeurite's passion for Guise exceeds all boundaries, including those of her own physical integrity:

> For Oh, I love beyond all former passion:
> Dye for him! That's too little; I could burn
> Piece-meal away, or bleed to Death by drops,
> Be flead alive, then broke upon the Wheel…
> And when let loose from torments, all one Wound,
> Run with my mangled Arms, and crush him dead. (3.1.21-27)

This is matched, however, by her lover's passion for revenge. Guise avows that he would 'Hurl her to the Sea! / The Air, the Earth, or elemental Fire,' if it enabled him to see his arch-enemy the Admiral, compared in an extended and rather ludicrous simile to a giant whale, 'Struck on those Scouring Shallows which await him' (1.1.120-28). As Hayne argues, laughter could be a legitimate and even appreciative response to such outbursts of heroic temper in which (as Cibber suggests) size trumps sense.[48] Lee's Queen Mother lusts for vicarious power in similarly exaggerated terms (eg 1.2.6-9) while her hapless son King Charles slides into an ecstasy of remorse, relating nightmares in which his body disintegrates (1.2.51-55) and macabre visions in which he is led through a crypt or hunted by his victims' Furies (5.1.34-35; 5.5.14-16). To further magnify the intensity of their utterances, Lee traps

[46] It was revived in 1715-16 and again in 1745 in response to the Jacobite uprising. (Source: Van Lennep et al., 1960-68).
[47] Powell (1984), 34, 88. Taylor (1972), 60 argues for the retention of "Passions" as the driving force behind characterisation.
[48] Laughter 'expressed admiration for the performance but also distanced the audience from the performance,' enabling the actor (and his skill) to remain firmly in view at all times, rather than being effaced by his character. Hayne (1996), 348. Powell 1984, 57 & 87 writes that 'the Restoration playhouse preserved a presentational ambience' and that '[its] atmosphere… was that of a sophisticated cabaret.'

his characters in a *huis clos* setting, the corrupt French court which the Protestant Admiral calls an 'Abyss' (2.1.103). For four acts, menace is gathered from cumulative linguistic association rather than scenic literalism. Anticipating the sight of his wife, for instance, the Admiral muses that

> The face of Beauty on these rising horrours
> Looks like the Midnight-Moon upon a murder:
> It drives the Shades that thicken from the state
> And gilds the dark design that's ripe for Fate (4.1.247-50).

Horrors that 'rise' and shades that 'thicken' produce a ceaseless increase in tension; the unseen design is 'ripe', although not yet executed. No murder has so far been committed, so whatever the moonlight might fall upon remains invisible, implicit, swallowed in shadows and all the more ominous for its obscurity. The darkness, moreover, appears 'gilded', limned with a superficial glitter not unlike that of the ripe but rotten court, the *Coeur*, the core. Rather than sustaining this borderline surrealism, however, Lee dissipates it in the final act. Making spectacular use of the inner stage, he engineers a double reveal: the scene draws twice, first to show the Protestant leaders gunned down by a firing squad, and immediately afterwards to show the Admiral's mutilated body hanged and burning.[49] In thus bringing atrocity out brutally into the open, these pictorial tableaux perform what could almost be regarded as a generic shift from horror to thriller. As depiction supplants reportage, the verbal superfluity which made Lee's French court so sinister – and so senecan – is cut off, exposing

[49] It is not clear whether these appeared sequentially in the same scenic frame. Other possibilities are that the Admiral's body appeared above, or that a second set of shutters opened behind the fallen Protestants to reveal him in a deeper compartment; this is an attractive option and one available to Drury Lane at the time (see diagram in Langhans 1980, 41).

a more thuggish and institutionalised breed of terror. Execution is not performed under the midnight-moon, but rather under the dry sanction of daylight.[50]

The *Massacre*'s replacement, *Caesar Borgia*, is for our purposes notable mainly for the attention it pays to the haptic properties of speech. As in *Nero*, words in *Caesar Borgia* are attributed physical effects, particularly through the speech act of the curse. When Orsino curses his daughter Bellamira, she begs for death or dismemberment as a milder alternative, since 'There's not one fatal sentence, one dread Word / But runs like Iron through my freezing blood' (2.1.11-12). Bellamira delivers her own execration of Borgia accompanied by reflexive reference to how her "thundering" voice as it howls the villain's name will 'shake the world':

> Methinks that Word, that spell, that horrid Sound,
> That groan of Air should cleave the neighbouring Rocks
> And scare the babbling Ecchoes from their Dens (4.1.396-401).

Borgia himself employs Machiavel as a surrogate voice, inciting him to 'Call up a friendly rage' to curse Bellamira and her lover (4.1.261). Machiavel obliges, imagining his breath to be 'sulph'rous as the lightning', a murderous blast of poison or plague. Although Machiavel's rage is feigned and conditional (*If* it were sulph'rous, *then thus* would he curse them), whipped up on Borgia's instructions, the physical impact of language which he imagines does not differ radically from that imagined by Bellamira as she suffers and inflicts quasi-magical linguistic damage. The spoken word can cleave and stab and infect, operating like a 'spell' as it shapes surrounding matter.

[50] The onstage deaths in the Senecan corpus are relatively few: Jocasta, Phaedra, Medea's children and possibly the children of Hercules. The offstage deaths related in detail are Hippolytus, Thyestes' children, Agamemnon and Astyanax / Polyxena. Wholesale annihilation is an early modern enhancement.

After the crisis of succession was resolved (and after Nathaniel Lee's death in 1689), the brief affinity of the Restoration theatre with senecan material appears to fade.[51] In 1707, Edmund Smith's version of *Phaedra and Hippolytus* opened at the Queen's Theatre. Traces of Seneca remain - Phaedra approaches Hippolytus herself, comparing him to 'Theseus, as he was when mantling blood / Glow'd in those lovely cheeks… / When Theseus was Hippolytus' (2.1), and kills herself onstage with the fatal sword - but overall these are enmeshed in a Racinian plot in which Phaedra is consumed by jealousy of her stepson's love for the Cretan princess Ismena. Notably absent is the bull from the sea, and any reference to the Minotaur or the labyrinth. Likewise, Smith suppresses any mention of Theseus' philandering, transforming him into a doting husband and heroic warrior. Hippolytus' virtue leaves him vulnerable to the Machiavellian machinations of Phaedra's counsellor Lycus. On Lycus' accusation, Theseus condemns Hippolytus to execution, prompting Phaedra's confession and suicide; Hippolytus then bursts onstage, having escaped in the nick of time to be happily and appropriately reunited with Ismena. 'Unguarded virtue human arts defies,' he rejoices in the play's closing couplet. 'Th'accused is happy, while th'accuser dies.' The brutality of Hippolytus' Senecan death is transferred instead to the 'monster' Lycus:

> Drag him to all the torments Earth can furnish;
> Let him be rack'd and gash'd, impaled alive:
> Then let the mangled monster, fix'd on high,
> Grin o'er the flouting crowds, and glut their vengeance.

Just as Seneca's Hippolytus is 'impaled alive' and fix'd on high' on the projecting branch of a tree (1099-1104), so Lycus is to be similarly 'mangled'. The vulgar crowd may no longer

[51] Although *Oedipus* and *The Rival Queens* entered the repertoire, enjoying regular re-performance during the eighteenth century (source: Van Lennep et al. 1960-68), new writing rarely utilised a senecan dramatic mode.

be permitted to glut themselves on the blood of the innocent, but the senecan thirst for theatricalised violence nevertheless claims a substitute victim.

## Conclusion

Despite his incorporation of the striking visual effects made available by the revolution in stage architecture, Lee continued to recognise language as a shape-shifting, mood-altering substance throughout his theatrical career. In Seneca's work, and in later works composed under his influence, the theatricality (to paraphrase Eliot) is all in the word: the setting, scenic rhythm, emotional range, and metaphorical connotations are all accomplished through the quasi-musical arrangement of figured discourse. Lee's claims about the bodily efficacy of language in *Nero*, *Oedipus* and *Borgia* reflect his anticipation that tragedy could have similarly physical effects on its auditors, as suggested by the passage on the reception of *Hercules Furens*. Like Seneca's, Lee's plays are works of hypertragedy, utilising strategies of verbal saturation such as hyperbole, pleonasm, adynata, ecphrasis and a universalising vocabulary to stimulate sensory overload, an overload which (unlike Seneca's) was additionally translated explicitly into the visual domain. The senecan features in the work of Lee and his contemporaries were applied to a theatrical context quite different from the playhouses of the previous generation, and indeed among the Exclusion playwrights only Lee appears to have maintained an interest in developing a poetics of excess. Overall, Lee's body of work represents Seneca and senecanism in a period of transition. English tragedy still retained elements which had been the core of pre-Interregnum drama,[52] but these now served as embellishments for a developing form that favoured dialogue, action and complex plots. As the visual progressively overtakes the verbal to become Lee's preferred theatrical

[52] Bevis (1988), 7-16.

medium, passages of pure Seneca do remain, but they remain as shrinking dark pools in an increasingly colourful scenescape.

## Chapter 6

## SENECA CENSORED

Over the course of the eighteenth century, senecan elements diminished in the wake of regularisation and the recuperation of the legitimate stage as a showcase for polite morals. This chapter addresses the reasons for and the results of these changes, particularly insofar as they influenced the interpretation of Seneca's work. Developments in theatrical production and its surrounding discourses, in particular the prevailing concept of "sympathy", replaced aural with visual stimulus as the basis of theatrical experience. Further restricted by the Stage Licensing Act of 1739, English dramatic repertoire entered a bottleneck. Certain eighteenth-century plays, such as Glover's *Medea* (1761) and Thomson's *Agamemnon* (1737) gestured towards Seneca, but in practice contained little that could be called senecan. The disconnect between a performer's words and his/her bodily presence created by figured discourse became so unacceptable that by the turn of the nineteenth century even Shakespeare was subjected to accusations of untheatricality.

It was this aesthetic ideology that enabled German critic A.W. Schlegel to denounce Seneca as unstageable, an outburst also prompted by the philhellenic desire to attribute cultural primacy to Greece and vilify Rome as correspondingly degraded. Prior to the philhellenic phenomenon, Seneca had been receiving serious attention comparable to that afforded the Greek tragedians, as shown by Lessing's commentary on the plays;[1] afterwards, his work was reinvented as stylistic anathema. Schlegel's orthodox opinion, however, was challenged by Heinrich von Kleist, whose tragedy *Penthesilea* stands out as an extraordinarily senecan performance text between the popular appetite for sentiment and the intellectual taste for "Greece".

[1] '*Wir wollen zuweilen aus dem Sophokles, Euripides und Aeschylus ein Stück übersetzen… Dies wollen wir auch mit… dem tragischen Seneca thun*.' Quoted in Barner (1973), 17.

The Long Eighteenth Century

The major social shift during this period was the consolidation of the bourgeoisie into a powerful, even dominant class, supplanting the aristocratic minority as arbiters of normative values including artistic taste.[2] Corresponding ideological developments affecting theatrical practice included individualism and 'sympathy', discourses which may appear contradictory but in fact share a common premise: the ordinary individual is important. His feelings, or sensibilities, are worthy of recognition; his abilities and personal attributes, rather than his provenance, confer merit and status. Most influentially, he regards himself as deserving representation, in the artistic as well as political sense. He is a subject, possessing a unique and interesting subjectivity. The rights of man include not only equality before the law but equal access to self-depiction, even in media previously reserved for kings. Instead of revolving around the high-flown courts of foreign sovereigns, tragedy now deigned to show urban, domestic affairs. The sympathetic spectator was supposed to identify with the characters as they endured familiar tribulations en route to a typically happy ending. Characters acquired specificity, no longer appearing as emblems of the mental states associated with tyranny, passion or revenge, but as the particular individuals temporarily experiencing such states. Therefore, since observable human behaviour takes place in prose – or rather, an irregular patchwork of prose and silences – poetry began, paradoxically, to impede communication.

In conjunction with the increasing popularity of drama grounded in the everyday, playhouses themselves were becoming permanent public institutions. Their income depended upon middle-class audiences rather than aristocratic patronage, resulting in a high turnover of commercially successful material rather than the development of more literary endeavours.

[2] Greenberg (1992), 178 & 183; Bevis (1988), 114-18; Powell (1984), 151-55. DeRitter (1994), 147 refers to 'the authoritarian voice of the bourgeois culture of this era.'

Companies aiming for stability and regularity could not afford to offend prevailing taste.[3] The kind of repertoire typical of the legitimate London theatres shows the prevalence of romantic comedy and sentimental romance, interspersed with revivals of Restoration or Shakespearean classics. New works rarely possessed sufficiently competitive vigour to enter the canon.[4] Following the Stage Licensing Act of 1737, which subjected all scripts to the scrutiny of the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays and limited the licensed London theatres to two (Covent Garden and Drury Lane),[5] managements became even more conservative.

Moreover, Steiner argues, the social role of theatre was no longer a matter of community involvement but rather a personal diversion, entertainment to be consumed instead of an event in which the crowd participated.[6] Audiences did not expect an artistic contract based on reciprocity, but on gratification, assuming the right to be entertained without the corresponding responsibility of creative attention. Entering what Steiner calls 'the repose of illusion',[7] and encouraged by the concurrent privilege afforded to painting as a representational medium, theatre audiences became increasingly accustomed to accurate visual depiction of a setting. Beginning as early as the French neoclassical departure from *décor simultané*, this process continued to develop until the introduction of the box-set, and beyond. Innovations in stage lighting meant that the auditorium could be darkened, decisively severing the audience from the zone designated for activity and display.[8] Footlit actors were held to far more rigorous mimetic standards than their Renaissance or even neoclassical

[3] On this issue in German theatre: Patterson (1990), 158; Carlson (1978); Williams (1985), esp. 116-19; Richter (2005).
[4] Exceptions drawn from antiquity are Addison's *Cato* and Phillips' *The Distress'd Mother*, based on Euripides' *Andromache*. She-tragedy such as Rowe's *Jane Shore*, Banks' *Virtue Betray'd*, Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage* and Otway's *The Orphan*, and sentimental drama like the stage-adaptation of Richardson's *Pamela* also had regular repeat seasons. (Source Van Lennep et al., 1960-68.)
[5] This Act tightened existing legislation, and was implemented with the dual purpose of clamping down on the proliferation of London playhouses and preventing the public exhibition of 'seditious libel'. Liesenfeld (1984); Kinservik (2007).
[6] Compare Powell (1984), 23-28 & 87 on the atmosphere that prevailed in the Restoration playhouse.
[7] Steiner (1961). 116.
[8] Garrick's production designer, Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, was a pioneer of stage lighting effects. Multi-wick oil lamps replaced the chandeliers at Drury Lane in 1765, and Argand lamps were installed in 1780. Penzel (1978), 22-23; Baugh (2007), 51-53.

predecessors. Their bodies ceased to be vessels for speech and acquired unprecedented specificity as visual signs.[9] Naturalism in language, in characterization, in design and *mise-en-scène* began to pervade theatrical practice for the first time, and a naturalistic theatre based on sincerity and visual correspondence was incapable of accommodating extremes of poetic discourse.[10] In this domain where visible exteriors prevailed, the senecan aesthetic faltered.

The first section of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) articulates the philosophical principle of 'sympathy' on which much mid-century theatrical practice was based. According to Smith, sympathetic responses reside purely in the spectator's imagination. We are incapable of literally feeling another person's pain, or desire, or satisfaction, so we can experience sympathy only by imagining ourselves in a corresponding situation.[11] Seeing only the effect of an injury therefore stimulates less genuine sympathy than seeing the cause; indeed,

> we are disgusted with that clamorous grief, which, without any delicacy, calls upon our compassion with sighs and tears and importunate lamentations. But we reverence that reserved, that silent and majestic sorrow, which discovers itself only in the swelling of the eyes, in the quivering of the lips and cheeks, and in the distant, but affecting, coldness of the whole behaviour.[12]

Smith regards tragic characters who indulge in expressions of pain - Philoctetes, Hippolytus and Hercules, for instance - as misguided appeals to the audience's sympathy.[13] For Smith, passions as states of being hold no interest, and leave us cold; showing a hero *resisting*

[9] This has also been noted in feminist scholarship on Restoration theatre, for example Diamond (1989); Payne (1995) and Nussbaum (2010), 75-78.
[10] Greenberg (1992), 190 calls this phenomenon 'a passion for images rather than… a desire for discourse.'
[11] Smith (1986) [1759], 2; on the philosophical ramifications, J. Lamb (2009).
[12] Smith (1986) [1759], 28.
[13] 'These attempts to excite compassion by the representation of bodily pain, may be regarded as among the greatest breaches of decorum of which the Greek theatre has set the example.' Smith (1986) [1759], 39.

breakdown, however, allows the spectator to project her own emotional inferences onto the scene. David Marshall discusses contemporary anxieties centred on the impossibility of truly communicating, since sympathy entailed an inescapably illusory displacement of self: 'Displaying oneself to the eyes of the world would still mean concealment, in which making oneself transparent [for instance, via autobiography] might mean rendering oneself invisible,' that is, inaccessible behind a screen of expressive discourse.[14] This is precisely the senecan paradox: the more extravagant the rhetoric, the less authentic the experiences it can disclose. Personal suffering, meanwhile, can be most powerfully communicated by leaving its true extent to the spectator's imagination. As West comments, the favourable comparison of actors to works of art, particularly classical sculpture, resulted from this rejection of an expressionism that masked authentic feeling in favour of a restraint that invited commiseration.[15]

The discourse of sympathy intersected with the discourse of private life. In the prologue to his enduringly popular *The Fair Penitent* (written in 1703, and regularly restaged throughout the century), Nicholas Rowe offers what Bevis calls 'a manifesto for domestic tragedy'.[16] Tragedy, Rowe asserts, has hitherto concerned itself with royal crisis and imperial downfall, but 'We ne'er can pity what we ne'er can share… Therefore a humbler theme our author chose, / A melancholy tale of private woes'; in other words, 'sorrows like your own.'[17] Various assumptions underpin Rowe's manifesto. The point of tragic drama is to inspire 'generous Pity', as he reminds us in the Dedication; pity results from sympathy, a 'shared' experience of suffering; such sympathy cannot be elicited by presenting extraordinary events

[14] Marshall (1988), 175
[15] 'The less mobile Siddons and Kemble became, the more critics and writers found to read into their attitudes.' West (1991), 120.
[16] Bevis (1988), 130. Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731) is the paradigmatic domestic tragedy. DeRitter (1994) shows how it participates in constructing a bourgeois ideology.
[17] Lessing likewise advises that 'The misfortunes of those whose circumstances most resemble our own, must naturally penetrate most deeply into our hearts… What matters the rank, the surname, the genealogy of the unfortunate man?' (*HD* pp38-39.)

or monstrous characters. *The Fair Penitent* concerns a simple love triangle, permitting the trivial agony comprising interpersonal relationships - desire, duplicity, regret, misunderstanding - to find expression in grandly tragic discourse. 'I am all Contagion, Death, and Ruin,' sobs the suicidal Calista, whose unforgivable crime is to have lost her virginity to a man who later refused to marry her. 'And Nature sickens at me; rest, thou World, / This Parricide shall be thy Plague no more' (5.1.241-43). Unlike the senecan tragedies whose diction this imitates (most obviously *Oedipus*), *The Fair Penitent* contains no incest, rape, megalomania nor infanticide. Anyone may relate to Calista's 'private' sorrows, but tensions on a larger scale, such as the conflict of obligation to state and family, are restricted to a privileged (or desperately unfortunate) minority, and therefore incapable of igniting the desired spark of sympathetic recognition in the bourgeois spectator.

Trends in performance style shifted in a non-linear way, succeeding one another like a pendulum that swung back and forth erratically between stylization and sincerity. In 1747, actor-manager David Garrick took over Drury Lane and became one of the period's iconic theatrical personalities.[18] His artistic innovations instigated a decisive transformation in acting style, a turn towards greater naturalism which also contributed to the decline of senecan delivery. Peter Holland calls this 'the Garrick sonic revolution.'[19] Whereas his contemporaries habitually exaggerated the dynamics of volume, emphasis and pitch, creating the heightened contrasts typical of tragic "rant", Garrick himself developed a more conversational tone: faster, less vehement and more even, remarkable also for its frequent and often unpredictable pauses. Eschewing oratorical authority over his material,[20] Garrick instead gave the impression that he was pursuing a line of thought in real time. Garrick's pauses endowed his characters with an interiority implied by the sudden withholding of

[18] Milhous (2007), 123: 'Garrick's explosive effect on the London theatre scene… is one of the legends of eighteenth-century theatre history.' His international reputation is attested by Noverre, Diderot and Lessing.
[19] Holland (2007), 259.
[20] De Bolla (1989), 231-40 discusses the power dynamics involved in reading aloud or reciting text authored by another man, and its implications for subjectivity.

speech. Boaden observed in his 1825 biography of actor John Kemble that his delivery involved:

> *Pauses*, which were not before made; for the unlearned actor cared little about transitions of thought. He never examined of the associations of our ideas, how much in dramatic dialogue is suppressed - and never dreamt that the rapid junction of ideas totally unconnected is violent and unmeaning.[21]

This technique made it possible to perceive a contrast between the outer person, revealed in conversation, and the inner person, whose existence was declared as an open secret by the negative statement of the pause.[22] One could sympathise with the inner Hamlet invented by Garrick in a way not previously encouraged, simply by inserting one's own interpretations into the prodigious gaps between audible phrases.

From the midst of these developments emerged two plays with Senecan heritage. James Thomson's 1737 *Agamemnon* draws partially on Seneca,[23] considerably less on Aeschylus, and most of all on the contemporary fashion for sensitive heroines facing cruel dilemmas.[24] Like Seneca, Thomson presents a reluctant Clytemnestra who, after testing her resolve against an attendant, is bullied by Egisthus into carrying out their treasonous plot (Sen. *Ag*. 108-309). His Agamemnon treads on no crimson cloth, but instead enters the palace quite conventionally, leaving Cassandra and her accompanying chorus of captive women to

[21] Quoted in West (1991), 82. Boaden here attributes the invention of the meaningful pause to Kemble, but contemporary accounts of Garrick's work suggest that he employed a similar technique (examples in Holland 2007).
[22] Lamb (2009) shows how sympathy contributed to the eighteenth-century concept of "person"; West (1991), 19 cites the contemporary view of Hamlet's melancholic interiority. Sarah Siddons' apologia for Lady Macbeth (in Bate, 1992) excuses and explains the character's behaviour from the point of view of a sympathetic eighteenth-century actress.
[23] Thomson's classical education meant he could have easily read Seneca in the original. He definitely had access to Studley's English translation - his personal library contained a copy *of Seneca's Tragedies in English* (Munby, 1971: 56) - and possibly to Claude Boyer's French version of 1680, on which see Philippo (2005), 79-82).
[24] Hall (2005).

call on the Greek and Trojan dead to attend the fatal banquet prepared within (cf. Sen. *Ag*. 664-808). After Agamemnon's murder, Orestes is dispatched to safety by Electra (cf. Sen. *Ag*. 910-43). In addition, Thomson introduces the character of Melisander, a loyal minister returned from exile, whose praise for the virtues of frugal isolation echoes the sentiments expressed by Seneca's Hippolytus and Thyestes (*Thy*. 446-70; *Phaed*. 483-539). Overall, however, it is Clytemnestra's vulnerability and hysteria which effect what Hall describes as 'the transformation of an ancient tragedy into an excellent example of the popular eighteenth-century genre of pathetic drama, dominated by a suffering, virtuous heroine, which went under the title "she-tragedy".'[25] Thomson could have depicted a regal Clytemnestra goaded, like Lady Macbeth, by ambition and by remorse,[26] but he elected to focus instead on the common, intensely personal suffering occasioned by jealousy and betrayal. While this may have resulted from the inability of eighteenth-century audiences to stomach the (Pyrrhic) victory of a powerful woman, as Hall suggests, it also represents Thomson's desire to direct sympathy towards a victim of circumstance, rather than to inspire horror with a creature of revenge.[27] Clytemnestra briefly channels something of the senecan with her final, despairing resolution, 'Perish all! Perish my self, Egisthus, Agamemnon! So this proud rival this Cassandra perish!' (5.1), but it is Seneca's Medea, rather than his Clytemnestra, who prepares to drag the world with her to ruin: *mecum omnia abeant. Trahere, cum pereas, libet* (*Med.* 427-28).

Richard Glover's 1761 *Medea* likewise attempts to accommodate one of antiquity's infamously ferocious figures to the frailties of she-tragedy. Glover retains various senecan elements which, although incompatible with his sympathetic portrayal of an abandoned wife

[25] Hall (2005), 71.
[26] *Macbeth* was a stock play in the repertoire of both London theatres, and was staged on average once a month from 1700 onwards, alternating with *Hamlet*, *Lear* and *Othello*. (source: Van Lennep et al., 1960-68). Lady Macbeth became Siddons' 'most celebrated role' later in the century: Thomson (2007). See Thomas (1989), 360-61 for other notable portrayals of Lady Macbeth.
[27] Sambrook (1991), 182.

(e.g. 2.3), nevertheless seem indispensable to the concept of "Medea". His Medea employs universalising hyperbole, but despite claiming that 'I range with Nature to her utmost bounds' (3.3, p41), she is incapable of following through. Her boast to Creon that she could 'rock the iron throne of Pluto' and chain him to Riphaean crags in perpetual torment is followed by an abrupt loss of confidence in the 'fruitless, unsubstantial pow'r' that cannot command Jason's affection, and a helpless collapse into the arms of her attendants (3.3, p42). Similar failure of nerve follows her declared intention to complete her revenge by driving the Sun's chariot against Corinth and obliterating the city with flame and lightning. Rather than bringing down Armageddon, however, Glover's Medea then realises her feminine impotence, 'wrings her helpless hands,' and faints again (5.2, p52). Her power is not, however, altogether illusory. Like other Medeas in the Senecan tradition, Glover's sorceress summons supernatural assistance, and as the centrepiece of the play enacts an elaborate spell-casting scene onstage. Medea summons Hecate from the Underworld, attributing to the chthonic goddess the ability to suspend the movement of planets, stop rivers in their courses and hold the natural world in thrall as she ascends in the aspect of a Fury, 'wreathed in snakes' and bearing a flaming torch (3.7, pp34-35). Medea, sounding rather like a Stygian version of Sappho (frag. 1), complains that she has been 'vanquished' by love and begs the goddess's aid. Hecate replies tartly that consolation is 'not the talk of Hell' but she can offer her favourite vengeance instead. Medea reluctantly assents, but Hecate's dire prediction that revenge will destroy what she loves sends her 'sinking to the ground with anguish' rather than crowing in triumph (3.7, p36).

Medea kills her children not as a conscious act of sacrifice but in a fit of oblivious madness, an innovation which has been interpreted as denying her agency and therefore compromising her tragic stature.[28] In fact, Glover has combined two Senecan sources in order to gather maximum sympathy for an otherwise criminally insupportable heroine. The

[28] Hall (2000), esp. 53-55, in conjunction with Hall (2005).

precedent for a parent who unwittingly commits infanticide and must then confront the carnage on returning to sanity derives from Hercules *furens*.[29] Glover's Medea and Seneca's Hercules regain their senses in a remarkably similar way. As her rage subsides, Medea falls unconscious, and her Colchian attendant enjoins the chorus to sing 'some new and soothing modulation' which will assist the healing sleep, an episode corresponding to *Hercules Furens* 1053-1137 (the ode praising *domitor Somne malorum*, 1066). Medea revives, and upon realising what she has done laments like Hercules that nowhere on earth will receive such an impious murderer. While Euripides' Herakles expresses similar concerns regarding his exile (Eur. *Her*. 1281-90), the point is hammered home by Seneca: *in quas impius / terras recedes? ortum an occasum potes? / ubique notus perdidi exilio locum. / me refugit orbis* (1329-32). Moreover, it is Hercules who articulates the impossibility of cleansing himself of pollution:

> quis Tanais aut quis Nilus aut quis Persica
> violentus unda Tigris aut Rhenus ferox
> Tagusve Hibera turbidus gaza fluens
> abluere dextram poterit? Arctoum licet
> Maeotis in me gelida transfundat mare
> et tota Tethys per meas currat manus,
> harebit altum facinus (1323-29).

Glover's Medea reproduces these *adynata*:

> Not all the disburden'd sluices of the skies
> The wat'ry Nereids with the Ocean's store

[29] Agave is also a possibility, but this scene has fewer parallels with the *Bacchae*.

Nor all the tears which misery hath shed

Can from the mother wash her children's blood (5.2, p54).

Additionally refracted through *Macbeth* (2.2 and 5.1), these lines identify Glover's heroine with an alternative classical hero in his Senecan incarnation. Rather than depriving her of validity, then, they add another dimension to her peculiar amalgam of strength and sensitivity.

The fate of senecan theatre in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries might be compared with that of Shakespeare. Critics such as Hazlitt, Coleridge and Lamb maintained that performance detracted from the artistry of Shakespearean verse:[30] it introduced impurities into the stream of native poetic genius now identified as England's national voice.[31] Michael Dobson has traced the process of Shakespeare's canonization whereby his plays were adapted, collated, expurgated and refined into a corpus worthy of a national poet. With the publication of Bell's 1773 edition, offered to the reading public as a polite alternative to actually attending the theatre, 'the private, self-contained activity of critical reading… completely subsumed the atavistic, communal, and socially miscegenating experience of play-going.'[32] "Drama" - that is, the noble pursuit of dramatic poetry - sheered off from "theatre", the grubby, mercantile exhibition of plays onstage for fun and profit.

*King Lear*, according to critic Charles Lamb in his 1812 essay on the fitness of Shakespearean tragedy for stage representation, 'cannot be acted.'[33] Lamb's assertion that 'the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost

[30] Extracts collected in Park (1980).
[31] On Shakespeare's eighteenth-century appropriations see Marsden (2008); Dobson (1992); Bate (1989).
[32] Dobson (1992), 210. Dupont (2007), 123 notes a concurrent trend towards privileging the written text in contemporary France.
[33] Lamb (1980) [1812], 96. Bate (1989), 132 states that 'Lamb's essay marks a watershed in the history of one particular appropriation of Shakespeare: the tradition which singles out character, which psychologizes and internalizes, which Romanticizes and novelizes.'

any other dramatist whatsoever'[34] may constitute Bardolotrous pedantry, but the terms in which he rejects the performance of *Lear* bear closer attention:

> The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear… The greatness of Lear is not in his corporeal dimension… The explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare… On the stage we see nothing but corporeal infirmities and weaknesses… What have looks, or tones, to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the *heavens themselves*?… What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things?[35]

The problem, as Lamb identifies it, is an irreconcilable discrepancy between the elemental sublimity, the 'vast riches' of *Lear*'s poetic universe, and the frailty, the 'infirmities' of the crotchety old gentleman delivering it. The human actor is an inadequate medium, as his corporeality reduces the infinite dimensions of the imagination to inappropriate explicitness. His body ('gesture') and voice cannot give sufficient vent to the passions, tempestuous and volcanic, that rage through the text. The spectator, then, cannot *believe* that this is Lear, any more than a sheet of tin makes a plausible thunderbolt. For Shakespeare's poetry to retain its power over the imagination, it must remain unstaged. Lamb argues that 'the reading of tragedy is a fine abstraction', whereas theatre is assessed according to its visual verisimilitude: 'scenery, dress, the most contemptible things, call upon us to judge of their

[34] Lamb (1980) [1812], 88.
[35] Lamb (1980) [1812], 96.

naturalness.'[36] This clearly applies to theatre in the early 1800s, and just as clearly has no validity whatsoever for the early modern period, where the stature and appearance of an actor carried far less semiotic weight than his oratorical ability. As argued in Chapter 2, it was precisely this discrepant space between exterior form and linguistic content that encouraged an audience's imaginative participation; an inability to seal this gap entirely induces not admiration, but merely discomfort in Lamb's nineteenth-century spectator.

A backdrop to Schlegel

It was from this reluctance to give rhetoric a full-bodied voice that Schlegel's allegation of Senecan non-performance arose, and the censorship of Seneca as stage-text entered the academy. In his series of *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* delivered in Vienna in 1808, August Wilhelm Schlegel established an orthodox model which continues to exercise considerable influence over the appreciation of tragedy.[37] His Sophocles is the epitome of a classical perfection that developed from Aeschylus' primal grandeur and deteriorated into Euripides' 'flattery of the gross external senses' (*Lecture VIII*, p116). Modern poets, however, should not attempt to imitate Greek purity, but instead draw inspiration from the romance and pageantry of (German) history, with Shakespeare as their immediate model (*Lecture XXX*).[38] In between his idolization of Greece and his canonization of modern playwrights, Schlegel finds himself forced to mention Roman tragedy, a regrettable episode in theatrical history which he represents in singularly abusive terms. Although preferring to ascribe the Senecan corpus to the decadence of late antiquity, Schlegel concedes that its style is congruent with a Neronian Rome corrupted by luxury and tyranny. Furthermore,

[36] Lamb [1812] (1980), 100-01.
[37] Butler (1935), 310; Beus (2003), 42. Translated into English by Black in 1815; circulated on the Continent initially through Mme de Staël and her intellectually influential associates. For Schlegel's influence on English critics such as Hazlitt, see Bate (1989), 147.
[38] Beus (2003), 11-42, esp. 16, 38.

> whatever period may have given birth to the tragedies of Seneca, they are beyond description bombastic and frigid, unnatural both in character and action, revolting from their violation of propriety, and so destitute of theatrical effect, that I believe they were never meant to leave the rhetorical schools for the stage. With the old tragedies, those sublime creations of the poetical genius of the Greeks, they have nothing in common but the name, the outward form, and the mythological materials; and yet they seem to have been composed with the obvious purpose of surpassing them; in which attempt they succeed as much as a hollow hyperbole would in competition with a most fervent truth. Every tragical common-place is worried out to the last gasp; all is phrase; even the most common remark is forced and stilted… Their characters are neither ideal nor real beings, but misshapen gigantic puppets, who are set in motion at one time by the string of an unnatural heroism, and at another by that of a passion equally unnatural, which no guilt nor enormity can appal.
>
> …
>
> In a history, therefore, of Dramatic Art, I should altogether have passed over the tragedies of Seneca, if, from a blind prejudice for everything which has come down to us from antiquity, they had not been often imitated in modern times (*Lecture XV*, pp210-11, trans. J. Black).

This passage conveys both the vehemence of Schlegel's distaste and the unfavourable comparisons he draws with Greek tragedy, as well as the precise terms in which the Senecan aesthetic is rejected. Above all, Senecan characters and their behaviour are 'unnatural' (*ohne Natur*), a quality here applied pejoratively, implying a default dramatic norm which reproduces Nature; that is, which imitates exterior appearances. Disproportionately inflated

and ‘bombastic’ (*schwülstig*) - a criticism often directed at drama conveyed in speech acts rather than mimetic action - Seneca’s verbal overload is likewise interpreted not as an affective asset but as an ‘untheatrical’ encumbrance. The unacceptable hyperbole of rhetorical discourse is exacerbated by the characters’ lack of autonomy and moral integrity. They exercise no free will, therefore cannot be tragic; they exercise no restraint, and therefore cannot, according to Schlegel’s idealist definition, be heroic. Schlegel identifies in this passage all the distinctive elements of a senecan aesthetic, but ironically turns these same elements into derogatory ammunition. Seneca fills the role of foil to Greek sublimity: the villainous double, the fallen antitype.[39] His works resemble Greek tragedy sufficiently to invite comparison, sharing the name and form and features, but Schlegel recoils from such resemblance, explaining it as invidious mimicry. The Greeks were the original, holy source, which Seneca has profaned. Attempting to surpass these masterworks, his typically Roman hubris has produced not art but monstrosity. Every narrative needs a villain, and Schlegel’s is Seneca: a counterweight to Greek pre-eminence, an uncanny shadow cast by the gallery of marble profiles which he cannot afford to pass over in silence (‘too often imitated in modern times’). Instead, Schlegel attempts to repress this recurring force with a diatribe as violent as the material he seeks to expel from the repertoire. Seneca, compelled underground, persists in the very passion of Schlegel’s rhetoric.

In 1807, Schlegel published a *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d’Euripide*. Overall, the Athenian dramatist is preferred for the simplicity of his plot and the purity of Hippolytus as central protagonist. Euripides’ Hippolytus is compared to other *images d’une jeunesse heroïque* (*Comp*. p43), specifically those depicted in sculpture. Schlegel recalls Winckelmann’s enraptured reaction to the Belvedere Apollo in which the

[39] In its perceived illegitimacy and ‘degeneracy’, the senecan aesthetic occupies in this respect a similar position to the gothic vis-à-vis the classical; on which opposition see Gamer (2000), 49-50. Gothic melodrama, according to Bruhm (1994), 92-93 satisfies an ‘impulse towards total expression’ or ‘total disclosure’, an impulse which it shares with Senecan tragedy. Further connections between the senecan and the gothic are explored in Chapter 7.

exalted attitude of the statue elicits a similarly 'elevated stance' from the viewer transported by its ineffable power. In order to appreciate works of art fully such as Hippolytus, Schlegel proposes that *il faut, pour ainsi dire, être initié dans les mystères de la beauté, avoir respiré l'air de la Grèce* ('it is necessary, in other words, to be initiated into the mysteries of beauty, to have breathed the air of Greece,' *Comp*. p43). Racine, on the other hand, destroys this ideal with his damaging innovations. It is notable that most of these 'modern' innovations - with the exception of the romantic sub-plot involving Aricie - are those which Racine derived from Seneca: Phèdre seducing Hippolytus in person, Theseus' detainment on an adulterous escapade, the removal of divine machinery, Théramène's *récit pompeux* usurping the young man's death-scene, and the shift in focus from Hippolytus' dignified endurance to Phèdre's revenge and remorse. In addition, Schlegel disapproves of substituting verbal expressiveness for visible action; narrative makes less impression than enactment (*ce qui constitue les bases d'un sujet dramatique doit être surtout présenté bien clairement aux yeux des spectateurs*, *Comp*. p47), and figured language rings uncomfortably *de trop*. The form which Seneca gave the Racinian and post-Racinian stage is incompatible with Schlegel's criteria for dramatic efficacy.

Strangely, however, Schlegel barely mentions Seneca himself, despite the *Phèdre*'s obvious debt. The only 'borrowing' he identifies is that Phèdre retains Hippolytus' sword; meanwhile, he attributes all other direct resemblances, such as Hippolytus' offstage death and the absence of the goddesses, strictly to the modern tastes of Racine's audience. Roman drama receives an oblique blow with a reference to gladiatorial combat. If we simply wanted to watch men suffer mindlessly, Schlegel contends, we could return to the Roman Games; however, v*oudrions-nous que ces demi-dieux, ces héros descendissent dans l'arène sanglante de la tragédie, comme de vils gladiateurs, uniquement pour enbraler nos nerfs par leurs souffrances*? ('Would we want these demigods, these heroes, to descend into the bloody

arena of tragedy like common gladiators, just to shake our nerves with their suffering?', *Comp*. p76). Rather, what attracts us to tragedy is the spectacle of heroic *resistance* to pain, a noble soul discovering its finest resources in adversity.[40] Although at this stage in his career, then, Schlegel does not appear to have read Seneca - or at least, not with sufficient attention to have picked up the Racinian parallels - his grounds for rejecting the senecan aesthetic seem to have been laid already. Greek dramatists have been awarded a privileged position in theatrical history, while everything contributed by Seneca to contemporary theatrical practice is condemned, and this very contribution denied.

At the same time, Schlegel's ideas owed much to the philhellenist movement based at the Weimar court under Goethe and Schiller, the father-figures of German classicism.[41] Philhellenism embraced an idealised Ancient Greece for its purity and serenity, embodied in sculpture such as the Belvedere Apollo and the Laocoön group, which according to art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann in his brief essay 'On the imitation of the painting and sculpture of the Greeks' (1755), displayed 'a noble simplicity and sedate grandeur in gesture and expression' which was 'also the true characteristical mark of the best and maturest Greek writings,' by which he meant Sophocles. There was also a nationalist dimension to German philhellenism, which constructed a "special relationship" between a culturally superior democratic Athens and the ideals to which the Weimar intelligentsia aspired.[42] In pursuit of Grecian *Schönheit* (beauty), according to Friedrich Schiller, humanity would reform itself morally and politically. Schiller appropriated Greece as 'the well-spring

[40] Richter (2005), 439: 'The key moment in their [Goethe and Schiller's] response to Winckelmann's description is the idea of aesthetic containment… art's ability to contain and transmute that pain into beauty.' This standard formulation of the Greek tragic spirit was most comprehensively addressed by Lessing (see below).

[41] Reed (1980); Butler (1935); Beus (2003). Richter (2005), 450n1 points out that no distinction can be adequately drawn between Germany's "Classical" and "Romantic" movements: 'Not only are the Jena romantics and idealist philosophers… just a few kilometers down the road, but Goethe and Schiller's "classical" efforts are perfectly consistent with and even exemplary of the broader and far more legitimate phenomenon of European romanticism.' See also Grair (2005), 63. For more on A.W. Schlegel's literary theory generally, see Ewton (1972) and Reavis (1978).

[42] Stray (1998), 15 & 25; Butler (1935); Bernal (1987), 193.

of all beauty, untainted by the corruption of generations or of ages, which wallow in the dark eddies beneath it.' (*AB* IX).[43] Rome, for Schiller, is the original source of this corruption. Seneca's plays, then, came to stand for the absolute antithesis of what Germany required from antiquity: their darkness and corruption provided a powerful foil to perfected Schillerian *schönheit*.

This division of *die Antike* into pristine Greece and decadent Rome was a relatively recent phenomenon.[44] In 1754, playwright and critic Gotthold Lessing had embarked on a commentary *Von den Lateinischen Trauerspielen welche unter dem Namen des Seneca bekannt sind*. Although treating only two plays, *Hercules Furens* and *Thyestes*, this document gives a valuable insight into Seneca's reception just prior to the philhellenic surge. It is a balanced and overall complimentary assessment of the plays' strengths, such as their poetic beauty (*Schönheit*) and their compelling momentum, and their inevitable flaws, namely lapses in unity of time and a penchant for overstatement: 'He is all too prodigal with poetic colour, too bold in his descriptions… All too often, he gives Nature the appearance of Art';[45] but these, insists Lessing, are *lauter Fehler, in die ein schlechtes Genie niemals fallen wird* ('honourable faults, into which a lesser genius would never have fallen', pp80-81). Along with translating or paraphrasing substantial portions of the text, Lessing envisages the plays in virtual production throughout.[46] *Hercules Furens*, he suggests, would lend itself particularly well to the machinery, choreography and evocative soundscapes of opera (p87). Certain scenes, such as the 'splendid display' (*prächtigen Aussicht*) of Thyestes banqueting within the palace, are singled out for their exemplary stagecraft, while others require modification: Hercules, for example, should fall mad onstage but then commit his murders

[43] Trans. Snell (1994), 51-52.
[44] For a succinct account, see Barner (1973), 90.
[45] [*Er ist mit den poetischen Farben allzuverschwanderish gewesen; er ist oft in seiner Zeichnung zu kühn… die Natur scheinet bei ihm allzuviel von der Kunst zu haben*.] Translations from *TS* are my own.
[46] Barner (1973), 24-30 shows how Lessing's background as *Theaterpraktiker* contributed to his interpretations. See also Riedel (1996), 84-86.

out of sight, to be related by Amphitryon after the fact (p89). Far from denying performance, Lessing accepts it as Seneca's natural medium, integral to a full understanding of the works. At the same time, he also regards the plays' accommodation to modern contexts as inseparable from their appreciation as art. Crébillon may have gone too far in having 'watered down' (*gewässert*) his *Atrée et Thyeste* almost beyond recognition, but Lessing himself is not averse to the odd dramaturgical tweak in the interests of verisimilitude, advising would-be modern adaptors where to undertake such revisions as choral exits, line divisions, moral focus and additional characters. Some passages are altogether too poetic for their speakers, such as Atreus' hunting-dog simile (*Thy.* 497-503), which despite being *in dem Munde des Dichters… sehr schön* becomes recherché and unnatural *in dem Munde der Person selbst* (*TS.* p105). Lessing admires Seneca's feeling for language, but admits that it rings uneasily in a modern ear less accustomed to rhetorical flourishes (*Blümchen*) than the magniloquent Romans. His solution, however, is not to condemn the ancient playwright but rather to promote his work via practical concessions to the evolution of theatrical taste.

Lessing's later treatment of classical aesthetics, however, finds him responding to Winckelmann's promotion of classical Greece. His 1766 essay *Laocoön* distinguishes poetic representations of pain from those found in visual art, concluding that the emotional extremes which produce verbal affect are not suitable for sculpture or painting: the eye must be able to linger indefinitely on a frozen image, whereas poetry progresses towards its climax through cumulative waves of sensation. When applied to theatre, however, this neat dichotomy breaks down: should suffering be indulged onstage (as in poetry), or suppressed (as in art)? Although conceding that 'the drama, designed for living representation by the actor, might perhaps for that very reason have to conform more strictly to material representation in painting' (p24),[47] Lessing elsewhere reverts to treating drama as a purely verbal medium

[47] Butler (1935), 61-62 discusses this passage further.

(pp124-25, 134, 137). He defends the uncontrolled outcries of Sophocles' Philoctetes on the grounds that the vocalisation of such emotion elicits sympathy for tragic suffering rather than prompting voyeurism (*Laocoön*, pp29-30). It is in this context that Lessing makes his unflattering reference to Seneca's characters as *Klopfechter in Cothurne* (prizefighters in platform boots), a remark that entered the canon along with *Laocoön* as Lessing's definitive opinion of Seneca. As Barner has shown, however, Lessing's apparent change in attitude is both offhand and specific ([*es*] *ist beiläufig, und es ist particulär*), in that it is incidental to the discussion at hand and focuses only on selected aspects of Seneca's work, namely *auf die Charaktere… und auf deren Redeweise*.[48] Moreover, it comes after Winckelmann's irreversible introduction of philhellenism (*Gräkomanie*) into German intellectual culture, a discourse to which Lessing himself made no minor contribution.[49] Formerly, he had experimented with applying some of his recommendations for the modern adaptation of Seneca in his *bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755),[50] wherein a self-confessed *neue Medea* threatens her unfaithful lover with the murder of their daughter: *Ich will mit begieriger Hand Glied von Glied, Ader von Ader, Nerve von Nerve lösen und das Kleinste derselben auch da noch nicht aufhören zu schneiden und zu brennen* (2.7).[51] This early senecan expressionism did not last, however,[52] being progressively squeezed out of German theatre by the pincer movement of *bürgerliche* naturalism and *Gräkomanie*. Lessing's vacillation between aural and visual affect in *Laocoön* springs from an ongoing wrestle with the form and function of dramatic language. An older theatre of the word was giving way to a modern theatre of action, wherein dramatic poetry gradually became unstageable.

[48] Barner (1973), 91.
[49] Riedel (1996).
[50] Barner (1973), 36-51.
[51] ['I will with exultant hand sever limb from limb, vein from vein, nerve from nerve, and not cease to cut and to burn even the smallest part.']
[52] Richter (2005), 242.

By the Weimar era, a further subdivision separated a bourgeois 'realism' that replicated the subtlety of everyday actions from a Romantic 'realism' that required an actor to plunge into genuine frenzy during performance.[53] Both camps, however, continued to oppose neoclassical detachment on grounds as nationalistic as they were aesthetic; as actor August Iffland commented, 'The French give presentations, the Germans representations. Their paintings of the passions are splendid, ours true.'[54] Iffland worked with Goethe in the 1790s, and contributed to the development of Weimar's 'house style'.[55] Schlegel, then, defined his theoretical position within a theatrical marketplace dominated by an aversion to rhetorical presentation, as well as being informed by a discourse of sympathy that privileged identification with a character over immersion in their language. No longer restricted to channeling poetic imagery, actors and their visible interactions had assumed semiotic value in their own right. Weimar's house style was informed by the impulse to rework Greek tragedy in order to conform to ideals abstracted from the Ancients, and thus to inaugurate a programme of social rehabilitation through art.[56] This is especially apparent in Goethe's version of *Iphigenia in Tauris* (first produced as prose in 1779; revised into verse in 1802). Expunging the less desirable qualities of Euripides' protagonist - her cruelty, her duplicity - 'Goethe created in Iphigenie what Winckelmann had seen in Laocoön: noble simplicity and serene greatness.'[57] Goethe's *Iphigenie* represents an optimistic experiment in recapturing

[53] Patterson (1990); Williams (1985); Marshall (1988); Brown (2004). According to Richter (2005), 68, Lessing wrote the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* in 1767-68 as part of 'the latest, unsuccessful attempt to give the nonexistent nation a nonexistent theatre'; it contains much criticism of French dramatists, especially Voltaire, and is responding to what Williams (1985), 13 calls 'the grandiose gestures and vainglorious poses' of the current pseudo-French school of acting. The most comprehensive contemporary account of the debate is Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1769).
[54] Quoted in Williams (1985), 31-32.
[55] Williams (1985), 40; Carlson (1978).
[56] Schiller's manifesto, the *Aesthetische Briefe* (1794) outlines this project.
[57] Butler (1935), 101. Zimmermann (2004), 142 argues that Goethe 'humanized the theology of Greek tragedy' and ennobled his characters to bring out what he saw as the *aufklärische Duktus der euripideischen Tragödien*, 137.

classical form, *das Land der Griechen mit der Seele suchend* (*Iph*.1.1.12).[58] Following the professionalization of the Weimar troupe, Goethe directed Schlegel's own translation of Euripides' romantic tragedy *Ion*. *Ion*'s staging deliberately reproduced contemporary impressions of classical antiquity, presenting spectators with a panoramic view of mountainsides 'bathed in morning light that tinted with red the peak of Parnassus in the distance.'[59] A columned temple façade downstage enabled actors to appear in its brilliantly lit doorway as silhouettes, striking statuesque poses. The careful attention exercised over the visual details of the piece contributed profoundly to its impact, and marked a turning point in Goethe's directorial practice. Weimar actress Karoline Jagemann commented that 'Ever since *Ion*, he [Goethe] gave more and more attention to staging, to creating with his painter's eye lovely stage pictures in harmonious colours and enriching them with animated and ingenious movement of actors.'[60]

Goethe, like his contemporaries, came to regard theatre as a series of images, rather than an immersive or environmental experience. European theatre generally was in the process of evolving from a poetic into an increasingly pictorial medium. Whereas Lessing found it hard to decide which category this hybrid art form belonged to, Goethe as a director had no such doubts. 'The stage should be regarded as an empty picture,' he wrote in his *Rules for Actors* (1803), 'for which the actors supply the figures.'[61] Goethe assumed an unusual degree of control over what today would be termed stagecraft, the positioning of actors in relation to one another in order to elucidate the meaning of the text, and over the *mise-en-scène*, the coherence of interpretation. Previously, actors had been accustomed to attend to

[58] Iphigenie may be contrasted in this respect with Helena in *Faust*, personification of a vanished Greek ideal which moderns can only admire, never truly possess. Butler (1935), 144; Grair (2005), 86.
[59] Carlson (1978), 165.
[60] Carlson (1978), 256.
[61] Trans. Carlson (1978), 309-18. This idea of the stage-picture as a totality was initiated in London by Garrick's collaborator, designer Loutherbourg. Baugh (2007), 47-49.

their own personal delivery, but not its integration into the piece as a whole.[62] Now it was realised that meaningful configurations need not be limited to dramatic tableaux, but could extend throughout the whole play by means of blocking. Along with the illusionistic proscenium stage, the recent introduction of footlights also contributed to the ascendancy of vision. Footlights, as Patterson points out, 'provide a barrier between actor and audience, and effectively prevent the performer from seeing the audience, thus creating the "dark hole" of the auditorium, *so approved of by Stanislavsky*'.[63] Instead of clamouring for the attention of a raucous crowd, assailing their consciousness with the psychoactive penetration of sound and demanding in return that they participate in sustaining a dynamic relationship, performers sealed themselves off in a self-contained 'peep-show' and relied on emotional identification to dissolve the fourth wall.[64]

Despite the Weimar troupe's attempt to transcend artistic limitations with a revolution of the tragic spirit, they could not seal the rift between a professional theatre catering to the public taste for sentimental romances and bourgeois comedy - with dialogue in everyday prose - and the new genre of closet drama, dramatic poetry composed without the intention of staging.[65] Goethe himself regarded *Faust* as an artwork which should not be diminished by accommodating it to the practicalities of production.[66] But by this point, the German stage had undergone what Richter refers to as 'the transformation of a theatre of cruelty into a theatre of sympathy';[67] in other words, it had accomplished the transition from a senecan aesthetic of affect to a realist aesthetic of mimesis. Schlegel, then, condemns Seneca not only

[62] Patterson (1990), 19. Powell (1984), 101 likewise demonstrates that early eighteenth-century blocking often depended on the relative precedence of the actors, and that 'The emphasis is strongly on the words themselves and the particular attitude of the character speaking them' rather than creating a stage-picture.
[63] Patterson (1990), 31. Emphasis added.
[64] On the invention of the fourth wall, Marshall (1988), 105. "Peep-show" is Patterson's term. Powell (1984), 156-57 comments that shortening the forestage in the 1690s 'broke the intimacy of the actor's relationship with his audience, and must have encouraged the development of a new style to bridge the gap.'
[65] Bourgeois drama is discussed by Brown (2004) and Williams (1985), 113-19; on closet drama, see Beus (2003), 43-69.
[66] Patterson (1990), 115.
[67] Richter (2005), 442

because of his association with French cultural authority and Roman decadence, but also because current theatrical practice had squeezed senecan poetics out of the picture. Theatre, especially classical theatre, had become a space for viewing statues, not hearing them scream.

## 'Colossal, misshapen marionettes'

Nevertheless, at the same time as A.W. Schlegel published his strongly-worded opposition to all things Senecan, controversial playwright Heinrich von Kleist was composing an extremely senecan *Penthesilea* that attacked the foundations of philhellenic classicism. While Schlegel was denouncing Seneca's *riesenhafte unförmliche Marionetten* ['colossal, misshapen marionettes]' Kleist's *Penthesilea* inspired a performance in 1811 of its most offensive scene using the dance form considered at the time to be a reconstruction of Roman pantomime. In contrast to the philhellenist idolisation of sculpture, Kleist proposed a different kind of emulation in his dialogue *Über das Marionettentheater* (1810). Marionettes, he explains, 'incapable of affectation' (*sie sich niemals zierte*), perform purified motion. They are suspended from a single wire, a single centre of gravity around which their limbs move without conscious intervention, making the line traced by the passage of this centre through space 'nothing other than the path of the dancer's soul' (*nicht anders, als der Weg der Seele des Tänzers* (*Werke* p340).[68] Human beings, earthbound and wretchedly self-conscious, cannot aspire to this pure line, this weightlessness that comes with the total absence of self-assertion; by implication, the total absence of will. Innocence – grace – cannot be restored, but it can be purchased. In terming Seneca's characters *riesenhafte unförmliche Marionetten*, Schlegel was recognising and recoiling from the same quality of dehumanisation which Kleist places next to godliness. Seán Allan has drawn a useful parallel between the

[68] Translations of *Marionettentheater* by Wilford (1989).

marionette-theatre and Kleist's aspirations for poetic discourse: 'Just as the non-alienated "consciousness" of the Kleistian marionette is the property of an artificial, man-made construction, so too perfect formal transparency is not a property of natural language, but a quality to be found only in artificial languages,'[69] such as the senecan rhetoric employed in Kleist's *Penthesilea*.

*Penthesilea,* a violent subversion of its Greek mythic subject matter in which the Amazon queen falls desperately in love with Achilles and finally murders him in erotic fury, was composed in the same year as *Marionettentheater*. The impulse to recover Hellenic perfection appears to have been accompanied by a corresponding impulse to tear it apart. The echoes of Seneca's *Phaedra* in *Penthesilea*'s plot are inescapable. Achilles, like Hippolytus, stands for the perfectly-proportioned ideal of masculine beauty,[70] pursued by a powerful queen driven mad by an inner conflict between desire and duty. Love is realised as war - Achilles' 'bed of battle' (*Bette fern der Schlacht,* 592) - and as mutual captivity, until finally Kleist performs *sparagmos* on the classical tradition.[71] As Richter remarks, 'With Achilles' dismembered classical body, not to mention Homer's and Goethe's texts in tatters, *Penthesilea* introduces a new tragic language'.[72] Erika Fischer-Lichte describes the postmodern restaging of classical drama as a *sparagmos,* a Dionysiac dismemberment / resurrection of text,[73] and Kleist commits his version of *sparagmos* with a literal gusto evident in few other adaptations. Possessed by erotic madness, Kleist's Penthesilea hunts down and devours a surrendering Achilles. In a twist on the myth of Actaeon, she believes him to be a stag; in a twist on the *Bacchae,* she must eventually regain her senses and confront his mutilated corpse; like Phaedra, she acknowledges responsibility for destroying the youth's incomparable beauty, and commits suicide. The deed is "monstrous" (*entseztlich,*

[69] Allan (1996), 7.
[70] See above, pp216-18 regarding Schlegel's *Comparaison*, p43.
[71] Fischer-Lichte (1999) and Richter (2005, op. cit.; also Allan (1996), 166 on Achilles' perfection as illusory.
[72] Richter (2005), 447.
[73] Fischer-Lichte (1999), 17.

2714; *scheußlich*, 2895), and she herself is a "monster" (*scheußlich*, 2617; *Ungeheuerste*, 3000), transgressing not only the Amazons' religious and social customs but also the bounds of classical mythology. Kleist's reworking of ancient sources could in fact be regarded as no more radical than Goethe's own *Iphigenia in Tauris*, but *Penthesilea* tears open the ancient wounds which *Iphigenia* had so diplomatically healed. Both plays pivot on invisible rites dedicated to the goddess Artemis/Diana, but whereas Iphigenia transmutes human sacrifice into reconciliation, Penthesilea supplants lovemaking (the euphemistic "Festival of Roses") with a terminal consummation of her passion. With a grisly humour reminiscent of Atreus or *Titus Andronicus*, she calls her unspeakable act a 'slip of the tongue' (*Ich habe… bloß versprochen*, 2986). Penthesilea's mouth repeatedly confuses kissing and rending in this scene, as when she sarcastically asks the priestesses, *Küßt ich ihn tot?… Nicht? Küßt ich nicht? Zerissen wirklich*? (2978), leading to the natural culmination of the conflation of violence and eroticism committed throughout the play: *Küsse, Bisse / Das reimt sich, und war recht von Herzen liebt, / Kann schon das eine für das andre greifen* (2981-83).[74] Kissing, eating and speaking are interchangeable, in Kleist's grotesque economy of orality. Deprived of her knife and arrows, Penthesilea then uses speech alone to sharpen the edge of her remorse and plunge it repeatedly into her own breast, like verbal iron; absurdly, outrageously, horribly, she talks herself to death. Goethe was not surprisingly unreceptive to Kleist's aesthetic,[75] as *Penthesilea* altogether defies the now-standard definition of "classical" tragedy. Written in the senecan mode, Kleist's experiment uses the arc of a Phaedra-plot to disrupt classicism from within, turning on its 'alabaster' (2928) heroes, dragging them down from their pedestals into a dark bacchanal.

[74] ['A kiss, a bite - how cheek by jowl / they are, and when you love straight from the heart / the greedy mouth so easily mistakes / one for the other.'] (Trans. Greenberg).
[75] Gutjahr (2006); Reeve (1993). According to Mommsen (1974), 41, it is possible to interpret *das Verhältnis Penthesileas zu Achill grundsätzlich als Gleichnis von Kleists innerer Einstellung zu Goethe*.

Although not staged in full for several decades, an extract from *Penthesilea* was first performed as tragic pantomime in the Roman manner. In April 1811 at the Berlin Schauspielhaus, professional mime artist Henriette Hendel-Schütz performed Scene 23 of the work while her husband, an antiquarian and professor of philosophy at Halle, recited the text alongside.[76] Throughout the eighteenth century, attempts had been made to revive ancient pantomime in the form of *ballet d'action*,[77] Professor Schütz maintaining in his own work on the subject that 'the origin of the ballet is to be sought in the pantomime of the Romans.'[78] Hendel-Schütz had already become internationally renowned for the classically-themed *tableaux vivants* which she began developing in 1795 after seeing Rehberg's sketches of Emma, Lady Hamilton's Grecian "Attitudes".[79] Hamilton likewise created these sequences of poses in collaboration with her husband, who drew on his first-hand knowledge of literary sources and material culture to fashion an art-form based on reconstructing ancient pantomime.[80] The performance art practised by Lady Hamilton and professionalized by Hendel-Schütz was inspired by the elevation of sculpture to the epitome of "the Classical". Schlegel, in imaginatively reconstructing ancient stagecraft, had promulgated an apparently self-evident definition of tragedy as animated sculpture.[81] Hamilton's Attitudes and Hendel-Schütz's *tableaux vivants* participated in the same conflation of art-forms. Part solo ballet, part living statue, they presented a series of figures from antiquity – usually tragic – in characteristic poses, assisted by the drapery of a shawl or scarf. Not only the precision of the poses but the grace of the transitions appealed to the spectators.[82] Although it could be argued

[76] Reeve (1993), 79
[77] Lada-Richards (2003) and (2010).
[78] Holmström (1967), 259 n.108.
[79] Homlström (1967), 184-86.
[80] Touchette (2000).
[81] 'It is only before the groups of Niobe or Laocoon that we first enter the spirit of the tragedies of Sophocles,' and the tragic spirit 'may be most clearly recognised in Sculpture, where the perfection of form is merely a symbol of mental perfection and the loftiest moral ideas' (*Lecture XI*, p148). More explicitly, 'The most accurate conception [of ancient actors]… is to imagine them as so many statues in the grand style endowed with life and motion.' (*Lecture IV*, p62).
[82] Touchette (2000), 139-40.

that these women's bodies became little more than mannequins crafted and displayed by their respective male partners,[83] manipulative artistry played no part in the rhetoric of the Attitudes. Indeed the puppet could be seen as the antithesis of the free-standing groundedness of classical sculpture.

Hendel-Schütz's *Penthesilea* seems something of an anomaly. Far from the coy visions of Caryatids and the Virgin Mary which comprised her usual programme,[84] Kleist's Scene 23 presents a frenzied Amazon and a Homeric warrior locked in a fight to the death. Moreover, unlike the silent portrait-gallery which classical Attitudes typically sought to recreate, this performance was accompanied by a particular text. The scene consists almost entirely of a messenger-speech, the climactic monologue which relates how Penthesilea sets her dogs on Achilles, and in response to his gasps for mercy, 'sinks her teeth into his white breast, dogs / and woman struggling to outdo each other' (*Den Zahn schlägt sie in seine weiße Brust, / Sie und die Hunde, die wetteifernden*, 2670-71). Multiple characters appear in the scene: Meroe, who narrates the episode, and the priestesses who react with horror accompany the two protagonists. Meroe's narration offers opportunities for embodying the roles of both hunter and prey, as it switches back and forth between the perspective of dying, pleading Achilles and that of the raging Amazon. For all that Kleist keeps the bloodshed offstage, Hendel-Schütz' enactment brings it back before the audience. Although nothing of the kind had been suggested at this time as a performance medium for Senecan tragedy in antiquity, it is intriguing that Hendel-Schütz chooses to realise Kleist's most senecan work as pantomime. Holmström remarks on the deliberately experimental atmosphere that Hendel-Schütz sought to create in her performances,[85] so it seems reasonable to assume that the *Penthesilea* extract represented a calculated departure from the conventional refinement of

[83] Marshall (1998) on the Pygmalion-like qualities of the Hamiltons' collaboration.
[84] Holmström (1967), 191-200.
[85] Holmström (1967), 205-06.

her art-form. In any case, critical reception was less than encouraging,[86] and she did not follow it up. Hendel-Schütz's *Penthesilea* remains an isolated attempt to fuse a senecan text with pantomime action in conditions remarkably similar to those which have been more recently conjectured for first-century Rome.[87]

Conclusion

In accounting for Seneca's relative absence from eighteenth-century theatre, then, three interrelated factors can be identified. The principal cause is the anti-expressionist impulse derived above all from the discourse of sympathy, which maintained that the less histrionically an actor articulated strong emotion, the more powerfully his audience could identify; that is, project their own responses onto his reflective surface (or into the fertile hollows of his pauses). Actors, like statues, became receptacles for contemplation. Instead of relating the effects of passion in terms of somatic disruption or hyperbolic metaphor, addressing the audience with oratorical authority, eighteenth-century actors showed themselves subjected to passion's causes, caught footlit in the fallout of 'sorrows like your own'. Seneca also suffered from the disabling condition of not being Greek, which from Winckelmann onwards ensured that his secondary status was somewhat overdetermined. Nevertheless, it appears that Kleist for one was unwilling to swallow the purported 'untheatricality' of rhetoric, *récit*, self-dramatisation and the poetics of excess. *Penthesilea* contains no unmediated allusions to Seneca, but its occupation of the senecan aesthetic – the sub-genre of *Hypertragödie* – is undeniable.[88] Unsympathetic, unhellenic, inhuman, Kleist's *unförmliche Marionetten* resisted conventional staging, embodying the senecan (and also the sympathetic) paradox that the more expressive one's language becomes, the less communicable is one's pain.

[86] Reeve (1993), 78-80.
[87] Zanobi (2008a); Zimmermann (2008). Discussed in Ch. 1.
[88] *Penthesilea* as *Hypertragödie*: Hermand (1995), 43.

## Chapter 7

## SIGNALLING THROUGH THE FLAMES

Although enjoying frequent twentieth-century revivals, *Penthesilea* remained unstaged as a complete text for several decades following its composition. In this respect, it resembles another senecan play of the same period, similarly intended for performance but similarly quarantined, highlighting in the process those factors which effectively muzzled senecan drama at this time: Percy Bysshe Shelley's gothic revenge tragedy *The Cenci*. Unlike the closet dramas *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Cenci* takes from antiquity not the idealistic prospect of liberty and clarity but the family romance in its darkest form, or rather formlessness, disclosing within the aristocratic household a 'formless horror' (3.1.111) of incest and parricide.[1] This chapter first of all identifies the senecan elements in *The Cenci*, and then (in the absence of any contemporary performance) examines in detail the circumstances of its most significant stage production, the adaptation attempted by French Surrealist director-theorist Antonin Artaud in 1935.

Artaud came to *The Cenci* having already recognised the affinities between his own manifesto for a non-mimetic theatre of affect (Theatre of Cruelty) and Senecan drama. 'There is no better written example of what can be understood by Cruelty in the theatre,' he wrote in 1932, 'than all the Tragedies of Seneca.'[2] I will discuss in the second section of this chapter what Artaud means here by 'Cruelty in the theatre' and how this applies to his reading of Seneca, before returning to his treatment of *The Cenci*. Although making no explicit connection between *The Cenci* and Seneca's tragedies, Artaud picks out the same elements in both as conducive to realising the aims of Cruelty: the outsize, puppet-like characters, the disorienting cascades of imagery, the micro/macro responsion resulting from universal

[1] On the comparable censorship of *Oedipus* on the grounds of immoral subject matter, see Macintosh (2009), 112-23.
[2] In a letter to Jean Paulhan, dated December 1932. Artaud (1968) [1956], 232. All translations of Artaud in this chapter are by Victor Corti unless otherwise indicated.

*sympatheia*, all of which, as we have seen, are elements integral to the senecan aesthetic. Neither Shelley nor Artaud may have been conscious of everything their works were transmitting, but they became carriers nonetheless of a senecan performance tradition.

## Shelley's *Cenci*

Between approximately 1790 and 1820, gothic melodrama proliferated sufficiently to form a distinct dramatic genre.[3] Like the gothic novels which preceded it,[4] gothic melodrama based its effects upon suspense and sensation. Its plots were set in motion by their villains, taking place in dark, oppressive settings and typically involving supernatural encounters or the revelation of secret horrors. As well as the novels of authors like Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, the plays' source material included Jacobean and Restoration tragedies, which supplied dramatic precedent for the ghosts, the bloodthirstiness, the hyperbole and the cruelty.[5] They also shared the objective of arousing visceral responses; by the late eighteenth century, this could be articulated as inducing a sense of the Sublime.[6] Vast, savage landscapes - the ravine, the precipice, the cataract - alternated with the motif of incarceration, sweeping the audience into the wilderness and then plunging them into confinement.[7] Terror, rather than pity, was the appropriate response to both the uncanny setting and the multiple shocks delivered by the gothic plot. Although not performed until several decades later, *The Cenci* follows many of the conventions established by the existing theatrical genre.[8] Shelley's

[3] Ranger (1991), 107 gives 1757 as the date for the earliest proto-gothic drama; Cox (2002), 125-26 identifies Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother* (1768) as the first stage example of full-blown gothic, but concludes that most works fitting this description were produced 'roughly between 1789 and 1832'. Its concurrence with the French Revolution is not coincidental.
[4] On the transition from theatre to the novel in the eighteenth century, see DeRitter (1994).
[5] Cox (2002), 125 also mentions its debt to the German *Stürm-und-Drang* school, although according to Gamer (2000), the influence was mutual.
[6] Ranger (1991).
[7] Ranger (1991), 17-20; also Curran (1970), 132: 'The world is a nest of Chinese boxes, prison within prison: the evil world, the evil castle, the evil self.'
[8] Curran (1970) 159-73; also Murphy (1975), 152-84 & 13-22 on Shelley's engagement with gothic themes more broadly.

combination of violence and rhetoric, the Count's unspoken and unspeakable crime, his egregious depravity and his daughter's implacable revenge are conducted in accordance with a universe providing no alternative to abjection, and may all be traced via the revenge dramas of Shakespeare's contemporaries back to the theatrical manipulation of horror that emanates from Seneca.

*The Cenci* has been plagued by denials of the text's performative dimension and shelved in the distinctively Romantic genre of 'dramatic lyric'.[9] Nevertheless, it should be distinguished from other works comprising the Romantic genre of lyrical or 'closet' drama in that it was written primarily for the stage, not for private reading. Although releasing it as a published text after its rejection by Covent Garden, Shelley outlines *The Cenci*'s intended performance in a letter to his business agent:

> What I want you to do is to procure for me its presentation at Covent Garden. The principal character, Beatrice, is precisely fitted for Miss O'Neill… (God forbid that I should see her play it - it would tear my nerves to pieces); and in all respects it is fitted only for Covent Garden. The chief male character I confess I should be very unwilling that anyone but [Edmund] Kean should play.[10]

He adds in a subsequent letter that the play was 'expressly written for theatrical exhibition' and he believed it 'singularly fitted for the stage.'[11] Shelley professes to seek a public and embodied medium for his text. To this end, he employed an unusually accessible style of writing, incorporated popular gothic conventions, and selected star actors for the leading

[9] Curran (1970). The terminology is from Richardson (1988).
[10] Letter 23 to Thomas Peacock dated July 1819, in Brett-Smith (1909), 194.
[11] Quoted in Strand & Zimmermann (1996), 261.

roles.[12] Nevertheless, he placed them in an unacceptable vehicle, revolving around the (unspoken, unspeakable) act of incestuous rape, an idea which the *London Magazine* condemned as 'abhorrent to the feelings of the general standard.'[13] It is possible that Shelley merely miscalculated the extent of public abhorrence for his subject; it is equally possible that by advertising the play's dramatic potential along with its suppression, he was staging a practical protest about censorship. As Michael Simpson points out, drawing attention to the fact that something is hidden from view - kept, as it were, "in the closet" - functions as a rhetorical strategy emphasising the act of concealment itself, the injunction to silence.[14]

It is not only a conscious application of tropes on Shelley's part which makes *The Cenci* a Senecan play, although Mary Shelley observed in her journal that he was 'read[ing] Seneca every day & all day'.[15] Direct references in the text in fact remain few, but affinities can be established with Seneca's usual suspects - *Thyestes*, *Medea* and *Phaedra* - as well as with *Oedipus*, which Shelley attributes solely to Sophocles in his Preface, although he may well have also been familiar with the Dryden/Lee version then experiencing similar impediments to its exhibition on the English stage.[16] These affinities can be divided into thematic congruities, specific passages, and a more general concern with the communicative or affective capacity of spoken language. In addition, the unacknowledged debt of *The Cenci*

[12] Curran (1970), 169-71 comments on how these choices tapped into the performers' celebrity. On Kean's style of acting, see Thomson (2000), 115-24 and for his popularity with Romantic poets-turned-dramatists, Webb (1986), 37.
[13] White (1966), 188. The most scathing review was that in *The Literary Gazette*, which called the play 'an abomination' and 'a dish of carrion, seasoned with sulphur'. It is interesting how many of the reviews echo Beatrice's reluctance to give a name to Cenci's crime. White (1966), 167-215.
[14] Simpson (1998), 310-13; see also comment by Worton (1982) on the play's opening line, 'The matter of the murder is hushed up'.
[15] May 10, 1815. 'Seneca's Tragedies' were among Shelley's recorded reading for 1815: Feldman & Scott-Kilvert (1987), 92.
[16] On links between the Dryden/Lee *Oedipus* and *The Cenci*, see Macintosh (2009), 116-18 and Hall & Macintosh (2005), 6. Hall & Macintosh (2005), 530-31 further comment that in the later nineteenth century, 'the fates of these two plays were inextricably linked, featuring prominently in almost every important debate concerning theatrical censorship.'

to *Titus Andronicus* should be recognised, along with the associated implications of its senecanism.[17]

Elaborate verbal descriptions of physical pain naturally rank among *The Cenci*'s senecan attributes.[18] These include Beatrice's accounts of her father's habitual abuse (2.1.64-71 & 3.1.44-48) and the Count's curse on his daughter, with its kaleidoscopic images of bodily corruption (4.1.128-36),[19] and extend into the judicial chamber of the final act. The efficacy of torture is debated extensively, but finally the Judge declares, 'I'll wring the truth / Out of these nerves and sinews, groan by groan' (5.2.193-94). That 'truth' resides in the body is borne out by Beatrice's experience of pain she cannot communicate; the Judge's error is to suppose that the voice which he orders to issue from a tortured body retains integrity, and that he can extract coherent speech from inarticulate agony. He similarly elides the objective of torture with its outcome in piously commanding, 'Let tortures strain the truth 'til it be white / As snow thrice sifted by the frozen wind' (4.2.169-70). It is not, in fact, 'truth' that the rack will strain, but the nerves and sinews of the victim, and no metaphorical snow that will whiten with sifting and freezing, but rather the victim's lips ('yet white from the rack's kiss', 4.2.8). The Judge's attempt to distance himself from all but the abstract goal of torture – 'truth' – is capped and grimly undercut by Cardinal Camillo's response as he returns this imaginary driven snow 'yet stained with blood' (4.2.171).

Beatrice and her father both appear as superpowerful, even to the extent of erasing distinctions between themselves and the surrounding world. Plotting to assault Beatrice, the Count gloats that his act will resound through Hell, while 'upon Earth / All good shall droop and sicken, and ill things / Shall with a spirit of unnatural life / Stir and be quickened… even as I am now' (4.1.183-89). Such responsiveness of natural phenomena to the qualities of a

[17] The Senecan roots of *Titus Andronicus* were discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
[18] On the conversion of pain into theatrical spectacle in *The Cenci*, see Bruhm (1994), 84-93.
[19] Cantor (1976), 95 notes the similarities between this passage and King Lear. On Cenci's perception of 'a causal, almost mystical relationship between words and events' see Worton (1982), 112-13.

protagonist has already been identified in previous chapters as a senecan trope (occurring most obviously in *Oedipus*, *Phaedra*, *Thyestes* and *Medea*). A natural world operating in diabolical concert with human actions becomes standard in gothic fiction and melodrama, and shows its presence in earlier revenge tragedy often enough to be satirised ('Is there no thunder left?... Oh, there it goes!').[20] This responsiveness is traditionally concentrated in the *locus horridus,* the verbal scenery of a crime, a place whose characteristics metonymically represent the corrupted world containing the play's action. Seneca's *Thyestes* (650-82) and *Oedipus* (530-47) are both examples, as is Tamora's setting for her imagined death in *Titus Andronicus* (2.3.91-108), which subsequently becomes the site of Lavinia's rape. *The Cenci* also contains a *locus horridus*, namely the scene of the Count's proposed assassination. Beatrice describes with Romantic sensibility how the overhang clings to the crag like a dying soul to life, while beneath it, 'huge in despair, as if in weariness, / The melancholy mountain yawns.' This, apart from the formal structure of ecphrasis detailing a hostile landscape, is not especially senecan; however, Beatrice then adds:

> High above there grow,
> with intersecting trunks, from crag to crag,
> Cedars, and yews, and pines; whose tangled hair
> Is matted in one solid roof of shade
> By the dark ivy's twine. At noonday here
> 'Tis twilight, and at sunset blackest night (260-65).

The specific trees, especially yew, the tangled branches, and the darkness at midday all occur in both *Oedipus* (530-47) and *Thyestes* (650-82).

[20] Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy* 4.2.196-97.

Count Cenci's evil displays a libertine streak not found in Seneca's characters, but owing more to the maniacal villains of Marston and Middleton, as well as *Titus Andronicus*' Aaron.[21] What Cenci does inherit from Atreus is an inability to satisfy his appetite, an impulse towards excess that drives him almost against his will to commit crimes of greater and greater obscenity in an effort to stimulate his overstimulated flesh (1.1198-103).[22] Like her father, Beatrice feels the need to surpass what has gone before, convinced that her injury can only be wiped out by an act of greater violence: 'something which shall make / The thing that I have suffered but a shadow / In the dread lightning which avenges it' (3.1.87-89).[23] Far from the swooning heroines of gothic melodrama, Shelley's Beatrice wields considerable power of her own; although her eloquence fails to persuade, her gaze and 'tones' (5.2.108) have the ability to reduce the men who oppose her to speechlessness and confusion. 'My brain is swimming round,' (1.3.164) admits Cenci, after Beatrice's Act 1 appeal to justice. 'Inarticulate words / Fell from my lips' (2.1.113-14). Similarly, the hired assassin Marzio begs her to turn away eyes that 'wound worse than torture,' (5.2.109), protesting like Cenci that his 'brain swims round' (5.2.91) under the intensity of her regard. Beatrice coerces professional killers to murder the Count on her behalf, and proclaims when the body is discovered that 'The deed is done, / And what may follow now regards not me. / I am as universal as the light; / Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm / As the world's centre' (4.4.45-50). Her power makes her untouchable, a state which she expresses by claiming affinity with elemental absolutes: at once identified with the earth's core, the infinite air and

[21] Bate's assertion (1986), 212 that Count Cenci 'has a relish and intensity in the description of sadism and suffering that never occurs in Shakespeare' overlooks such speeches of Aaron's as 5.1.124-44.
[22] The *locus classicus* for this is Atreus: *bene est, abunde est, iam sat est, etiam mihi. / sed cur satis est? pergam et implebo patrem / funere suorum*. (*Thy.* 889-91); cf. *Phaed.* 204-15.
[23] Peterfreund (1991), 194 argues that Beatrice herself 'becomes the aggressor and seducer' in the second half of the play as she adopts strategies belonging to those in power, such as claiming divine authority. Endo (1998) makes a similar point. Simpson (1998), 390-93 relates this victim-turned-abuser pattern to the French Revolution.

most tellingly with the "universal" light, she momentarily attains a stature that unites her with Seneca's avatar of globalised revenge, Medea.

Two further passages suggest a senecan, if not indeed full-bloodedly Senecan flavour. Having announced his sons' death, Cenci raises a golden bowl of 'bright wine whose purple splendour leaps and bubbles gaily,' proposing that if it were their 'mingled blood' he would drink it with even greater pleasure; this image inverts the goblet of filial blood mistaken for wine in *Thyestes* (*Thy*. 913-18). Later in the scene Cenci returns to the goblet, entreating the wine to stiffen his resolve 'as if thou wert indeed my children's blood / which I did thirst to drink!' (1.3.175-76).[24] At the other end of the play, as Beatrice prepares to face execution, she reconciles herself to dying with an image of maternal consolation: 'Come, obscure Death, / And wind me in thine all-embracing arms! / Like a fond mother hide me in thy bosom,' (5.4.115-17). Her sentiments resemble Phaedra's, who likewise addresses a Death to whom she runs for comfort and envelopment:

> o Mors amoris una sedamen mali
> o Mors pudoris maximum laesi decus,
> confugimus ad te: pande placatos sinus (1188-90).[25]

Beatrice herself is no Phaedra, but the associations of damaged honour, sexual injury, perjury in the interests of purity, and unspeakable horrors silenced are audible throughout Shelley's text, and surface in Beatrice's farewell to a rotted world.

A major theme of the Cenci is finding adequate language to express something beyond expression – a *nescioquid*, a *nefas* – while simultaneously drawing attention to its

[24] Sellin (1968), 125 also notes the correspondence with *Thyestes*.
[25] There could also be erotic connotations, given Phaedra's intention to pursue Hippolytus through the Underworld, but *sinus* has been used previously at 1019 of the *gravis unda*, tying the passage into the play's network of maternal imagery. Death is also figured here as a *respite* from love (*sedamen*), not a continuation.

exclusion from direct discourse. Constant ellipses stand in for explicit references to the Count's intention or the deed itself (e.g. 1.1.102, 1.2.37, 2.1.56; 3.1.50, 3.1.56). Beatrice describes her recollection of the event as 'like a ghost shrouded and folded up / In its own formless horror' (3.1.110-11); her misery, even if ever shared by another victim, has never been recounted verbally and must 'die without a name' (3.1.118). 'There are deeds / which have no form,' she explains, 'sufferings which have no tongue' (3.1.141-42). According to Beatrice, Cenci's crime is wordless, 'expressionless' (3.1.214). Others find euphemisms such as 'ravage' (3.1.372) and 'outrage' (3.1.348), but for Beatrice herself, as for the entire verbal scheme of the play, no adequate term exists to convey the extent of the damage wrought on her body and her mind by incestuous rape.

*The Cenci* is predicated on the difficulty, if not the impossibility of expressing linguistically the 'formless horror' of physical trauma,[26] which may be regarded as a typically senecan trope.[27] In *The Cenci*, as elsewhere in the senecan tradition, the inability to translate pain into words with literal acuity results in a compensatory overflow of figurative discourse, an excess of hyperbolic language that translates it instead into metaphors that implant a reconstituted version of that pain in the consciousness of the audience.[28] Pain, the quintessentially Sublime experience, can only be approached obliquely.[29] Shelley preserves the traumatic event as an open secret in a dense closet of imagery impossible to visualise. Beatrice, having just been raped, enters in a state of apparent delusion which denies the

[26] See Worton (1982), esp. 107-09.
[27] Repetitions of *nefas* and *nescioquid* produce this effect, and it is summed up in Phaedra's *curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent* (*Phaed*. 607).
[28] As Endo (1996), 383 argues *en route* to a definition of the Shelleyan Sublime, metaphor permits language to remain concrete - opaque, and therefore 'world-disclosive' - in a way that everyday speech is not. Worton (1982), 114 similarly identifies in *The Cenci* 'two kinds of verbal expression: (1) the act of speaking in order to communicate and (2) the act of self-expression, which falls inevitably into silence as language proves incapable of formulating thought.' Peterfreund (1991) shows how the latter (metaphor) is perverted into the former (metonymy) as Beatrice adopts the casuistic language of her oppressors in the courtroom.
[29] 'Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.' Burke, *Sublime*, 1.7: (1958) [1756], 86.

audience the visual logic of a narrative, obliging them instead to suffer a disconnected string of powerful sensory blows:

> The pavement sinks under my feet! The walls
> Spin round! I see a woman weeping there,
> And standing calm and motionless, whilst I
> Slide giddily as the world reels… My God!
> The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!
> The sunshine on the floor is black! The air
> Is changed to vapours such as the dead breathe
> In charnel pits! Pah! I am choked! There creeps
> A changing, black, contaminating mist
> About me… Tis substantial, heavy, thick,
> I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
> My fingers and my limbs to one another,
> And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
> My flesh to a pollution. (3.1.9-22)

Her inability to name Cenci's crime results not in catatonia but in logorrhoea. As William Jewett argues, Beatrice's speech becomes 'expressive rather than communicative' as the discourses inherited from the reigning patriarchy founder on the mute fact of her violated body. 'Unfolding in a purely private register… [her language] impedes rather than facilitates understanding.'[30] Jewett identifies her 'rich, if circumlocutory' speech as a kind of

[30] Jewett (1996), 330.

*praeteritio*, professing to conceal a secret whose presence is advertised by this same elaborate speech-act of occlusion.[31]

This implies a suggestive link with *Titus Andronicus*. That Shelley drew on a number of Shakespeare's more respectable tragedies, including *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, has been well established,[32] but *Titus* does not seem to have rated a mention among Shelley's Shakespearean resources. Like *Titus*, *The Cenci* is a revenge tragedy divided into two halves. Both plays follow the rape and effective silencing of a virgin daughter with a paired account of retribution that compromises the revenger's moral superiority. Both plays centre on a father-daughter relationship in which love turns toxic; it should be recalled that Titus himself stages Lavinia's death at his cannibalistic banquet (5.3.46-49). In addition to the reminiscences already mentioned (such as Aaron's depravity and Tamora's *locus horridus*), the scene with most evident resemblance to *Titus* is Beatrice's entry after the rape. Just as Marcus translates the horror of Lavinia's injuries into excessively poetic ecphrasis (*TA* 2.4.11-57), so Shelley's Beatrice translates the horror of her own experience into a stream of non-literal haptic correlatives: spinning, sinking, choking, dissolving. She attempts to dissociate herself verbally from the body which has suffered, and claims to have been silenced by these 'sufferings which have no tongue' (3.1.142). Severed from the sphere of interpersonal discourse in which mimetic drama operates, Beatrice Cenci presents a state of radical subjectivity of the type regularly produced on the senecan stage by an otherwise unrepresentable excess of sensation.

## Artaud's *Cenci*

*The Cenci*'s first English performance, a private production mounted by members of the Shelley Society in 1886, was condemned by the press as 'dull almost beyond description,'

[31] Jewett (1996), 323. Compare Simpson (1998) on 'closeting'.
[32] Cantor (1976); Bate (1986), 206-31.

aesthetically as well as morally unfit for staging.[33] A larger-scale production in 1920, starring Sibyl Thorndike as Beatrice, enjoyed a much more complimentary critical reception: James Agate, for instance, admired Thorndike's 'hardness', interpreting her unsentimental characterisation as 'the embodiment of a pure philosophic idea – the idea of Rebellion.'[34] In Europe, meanwhile, the work was gaining a somewhat higher theatrical profile, particularly among the forerunners of the French *avant-garde*.[35] By 1935, it had already been subjected to several experimental treatments when Artaud chose it to demonstrate his revolutionary vision of an affective theatre, *Théâtre de la Cruauté* (Theatre of Cruelty). As this section will show, Cruelty already had strong ties to Seneca and senecanism. By applying these to his adaptation of *The Cenci*, Artaud reactivated its senecan attributes, albeit under the standard of his idiosyncratic post-surrealist *mise en scène*.

Artaud's manifesto *The Theatre and its Double* inspired a cult following, profoundly influencing avant-garde theatre throughout the twentieth century. Artaud invented a theatrical form – or at least, invented the concept of a theatrical form – which he called "Theatre of Cruelty". As Artaud explains, Cruelty is not the same thing as brutality. This theatre is not "Cruel" because it commits violent acts or indulges in the spectacle of pain, although many Cruelty scenarios do involve bloodshed and shock. Rather, it is "Cruel" because it inflicts a transformative experience on the audience which shatters their complacency. Cruelty refers also to the actor's self-discipline, defining performance as a devotional act requiring *rigueur, application et décision implacable, détermination irréversible, absolue*.[36] Theatre should not be entertainment, but rather a cross between religion and therapy, a spiritual surgery. Cruelty involves an immersive sensory experience. Human performers coexist with puppets and effigies, shafts of light and explosive bursts of sound. Artaud refers to it as a means of

[33] Review in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 8th 1886.
[34] Agate (1923), 188.
[35] Curran (1970), 197-218.
[36] Artaud (2010) [1964], 72-73.

translating metaphysical concepts into bodily form.[37] As Lee Jamieson explains, 'Artaud hoped that… the Theatre of Cruelty would be able to disorientate its audience by bombarding the senses of their bodies. By overloading the audience's senses with ear-piercing sounds, pounding drums, rhythmic cries, hypnotic drones and spectacular effects, Artaud hoped that they would be forced into partaking in the performance ritualistically.'[38] This is a theatre which purifies, stripping action down to its essence and abolishing passive spectatorship in favour of an immersive sensory experience. It is "cruel" because, in Susan Sontag's words, 'the audience should not leave the theatre "intact", morally or emotionally.'[39] Art becomes ritual; catharsis is achieved not through mimicry, but through genuine self-sacrifice, an exorcism, a conflagration of the spirit. Fire features prominently in Artaud's descriptions: gestures should rise as lava, producing 'incendiary images' in actors signalling, like martyrs, 'through the flames'.[40]

Artaud himself recognised such profound affinity between Seneca and Cruelty that his ecstatic recuperation of senecan principles may provide an antidote to the passage from Schlegel's *Lectures* quoted in the previous chapter. In 1932, he wrote to his friend Jean Paulhan:

> I am reading Seneca… He seems to me the greatest tragedian of history… I weep as I read his plays, and I feel the transparent effervescence of the forces of chaos groan under his words in the most sinister manner. And this reminds me of something: once I am better I intend to organise some lectures on drama – for a man who denies the text of the theatre this will be quite something – public lectures at which I shall read

[37] Artaud (2010) [1964], 40-47, 57-59. On the metaphysical dimension, see Sellin (1968) and Sánchez Léon (2007); on the associated philosophy of language, see Morfee (2005).
[38] Jamieson (2007), 7.
[39] Sontag (2004), 87.
[40] Artaud (2010) [1964] 57, 7, 18 respectively. According to Sánchez Léon (2007), 35 '*Artaud accorde une importance spécial au feu à la manière des stoïques*.'

> the tragedies of Seneca and all possible patrons of the Theatre of Cruelty shall be summoned. There is no better written example of what can be understood by cruelty in the theatre than all the Tragedies of Seneca [*On ne peut mieux trouver d'exemple écrit de ce qu'on peut entendre par cruauté au théâtre que toutes les Tragédies de Sénèque*] but above all than *Atraeus and Thyestes* [sic]. You know, it is still more visible in the mind. Those monsters are wicked as only blind forces can be and I believe the theatre only exists on a level which is not quite human. […] In Seneca the primordial forces echo in the spasmodic vibration of the words. And the names which designate secrets and forces designate them in the passage of these forces and with their uprooting and pulverising force.[41]

The proposal to deliver the plays in lecture format is interesting. They become a gloss on the principles of Cruelty, which otherwise could not be verbally expressed. Artaud's rejection of language finds an unlikely ally in Senecan rhetoric.

Artaud deliberately turns away from the written text.[42] His well-documented contempt for theatre which catered to the word at the expense of developing other elements in the *mise-en-scène* appears in essays such as 'Production and Metaphysics' and 'No More Masterpieces'. Neither of these positions was altogether original – Artaud drew on Symbolist and Surrealist ideas already circulating in the Parisian avant-garde movement - [43] but it was primarily their crystallization in his essays which brought them into the theatrical mainstream. The basic premise that a performance text includes every gesture and object in

[41] Artaud (1968) [1956], 232. Emphasis added.
[42] Esslin (1976), 70 refers to this as 'bypassing the discursive use of language and by establishing contact between the artist and his audience at a level above – or perhaps below – that of the merely cerebral appeal of the verbal plane.' Compare Sontag (2004), 86: 'Against the centuries-old priority that the European theatre has given to words as the basis for conveying emotions and ideas, Artaud wants to show the organic basis of emotions and the physicality of ideas.'
[43] On Artaud and Symbolism, see Duvert (1994).

the performance space is now the foundation for practically all current theory and practice,[44] while the suspicious attitude towards scripted theatre that reached its peak in the 1970s continues to inform the notion of what constitutes radical (i.e., atextual) or conventional (i.e., linguacentric) performance. In pursuit of a sensory, as opposed to an intellectual theatrical idiom, *qui s'addresse d'abord aux sens au lieu de s'addresser d'abord à l'ésprit*, Artaud identified two desiderata: the development of a 'spatial poetry' comprising all scenic and performative material present onstage (visual, sonic, architectural); and use of language for its value as soundscape. Chant, liturgy and incantation, producing affective reactions through tone and counterpoint, rhythm and repetition, were to replace the conversational use of language that dominated conventional drama.[45] Dissolving the orthodox identification of actor with persona, Artaud throws down the challenge: *Qui a dit que le théâtre était fait pour élucider un caractère, pour la solution de conflits d'ordre humain et passionel, d'ordre actuel et psychologique comme notre théâtre en est rempli*?[46] Using theatre merely as a vehicle for discussing socio-moral conflicts, according to Artaud, radically curtails its potential.

In certain respects, then, Artaud's aesthetic revolution is motivated by a senecan drive: the need to replace a theatre of imitation with a theatre of affect, a theatre in which figures (rather than characters) embody passions too fierce for the skin to hold, moving their audience through immersive sensation rather than mimetic sympathy. Where Artaud and his followers make an unnecessary departure from senecanism is in the assumption that this cannot be achieved through language. The systematic manipulations performed by classical rhetoric have no place in Cruelty, even though they were in fact designed for the same

[44] The work of such diverse performance theorists as Ubersfeld, Carlson, Rozik and Barba attests to this. Jamieson (2007) xv summarises the extent of influence among practitioners. De Vos (2011) 21 quotes Lehmann: 'In postdramatic theatre, the word is replaced by breath, rhythm, the now of the corporeal presence in flesh and blood… Its early theoretician was Artaud.' See also Finter (2004).
[45] Artaud (2010) [1964], 26-27.
[46] ['Whoever said theatre was made to define a character, to resolve conflicts of a human, emotional order, of a present-day psychological nature such as those which monopolize current theatre?'] Artaud (2010) [1964], 29.

purpose: namely, to slip beneath the intellectual radar and appeal to the auditor's psychosomatic subconscious. Artaud seriously underestimates the affective capacity of poetic discourse.[47] Attempting to escape dramatic text capable only of expressing established and therefore deadened, pre-digested thought, Cruelty pursues an 'objective theatre language' which turns words into incantation, meaningful only in their immediate sound-value.[48] Against the grain of this dismissal, it may be argued that such a language may in fact already be found in the stylized delivery of rhetorical verse-drama in the senecan tradition.

Artaud encountered Seneca at a point when, disillusioned with both traditional and contemporary theatrical forms, he was searching for myth and metaphysics. It would be a facile disservice to both Seneca and Cruelty to confine the similarity purely to shock and violence. Artaud perceived deeper affinities: the surrealism of overlaid, coexisting images, the inhuman scale of the conflicts portrayed, the vertiginous plunge into a nightmare in which every revelation of evil surpasses the one before. Artaud certainly had no hesitation in reading Seneca as a blueprint for performance. Various editions were available at the time,[49] but Artaud was most likely to have come into contact with Seneca's tragedies via the parallel Latin-French text prepared by Léon Herrmann and published in 1926. Artaud had a reasonable understanding of Latin, having studied it at the Catholic secondary school which he attended,[50] but as a practitioner rather than a scholar he would have found a French translation to offer more expedient access. Nevertheless, the parallel text is an attractive option, especially for someone fascinated, like Artaud, with the plastic and sonic aspects of language. Herrmann's is a prose translation, though readable and vivid, prioritising accuracy

[47] For an actor's perspective on working with classical verse, see Harrop (2010); for a director's account, Barrault (1946); on rhetoric as operating psychosomatically, DeBolla (1989).
[48] Artaud (2010) [1964], p64.
[49] There was a frequently reprinted *Oeuvres Complètes* translated by Nisard, most recent edition 1885, and a *Théâtre Complète des Latins* which seems to use the same text and is also published by Firmin Didot Frères. Jean-Pierre Charpentier's translation of the *Oeuvres Complètes* came out in 1908, and is another possibility. Artaud probably refers to the work as *Atrée et Thyeste* because this is the title used by both Crébillon and Voltaire.
[50] Maeder (1978), 27 quotes a comment by Artaud's sister in regard to his education: a studious child, he detested mathematics, but *aimait beaucoup le latin et le grec.*

over style but still managing to retain the pace and precision of Seneca's verse. The medium which brought Seneca into contact with Artaud's aesthetic philosophy was a product of the translator's own conviction that Senecan tragedy was a performance art.[51]

Among the plays, *Oedipus* and *Thyestes* appear to have offered the most immediate stimulus. Artaud's celebrated essay 'The theatre and the plague' was based on a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne in 1933, and since the letter to Paulhan (above) is dated December 1932, Artaud must have read *Oedipus* immediately beforehand. The plagues are strikingly similar, both in their corporeal manifestation and in the social breakdown that ensues.[52] Like most of Seneca's plays, *Oedipus* draws the Underworld up to the surface, a trope which may be correlated with Artaud's desire to give theatrical shape to dark subterranean forces. The supernatural world communicates in four successive episodes, beginning with the omens related by the Chorus at 160-79 (*rupere Erebi claustra profundi*) and mounting in intensity through the Delphic prophecy (223-38), Manto's autopsy (229-383), and the raising of Laius (530-658). Translation into Artaud's 'objective theatre language' liberates these passages from literal enactment and converts them into a rich source of concrete images, multiplying and evolving, a maelstrom invited by the text but not possible in mimetic theatre. The purificatory aspect of Seneca's *Oedipus* also resonates, in particular Herrmann's translation of Seneca's *rigat ora foedus imber et lacerum caput* (978) as *une affreuse pluie de sang baigne son visage et sa tête mutilée* (978-79).[53] '*Affreuse*' captures the horror of the onlooker but loses the foulness of Seneca's '*foedus*', relying on the specificity of '*sang*' to contaminate '*pluie*'. Both convey a fluid gush of rejuvenation or redemption, but whereas Seneca's '*rigat*' implies watering (as a river might nourish a meadow) and raises the spectre of what fresh

[51] Hermann (1927); further discussion in Chapter 8.
[52] Herrmann translates the plague's onset: *Sur le visage monte une maldive rougeur; de légères pustules viennent parsemer la peau; puis une argente fière brule de ses flammes <le cerveau>, citadel du corps.*
[53] Herrmann also re-punctuates this line. The Latin reads *rigat ora foedus imber et lacerum caput / largum revulsis sanguinem venis vomit*, out of which Herrmann creates two phrases: *une affreuse pluie de sang baigne son visage et sa tête mutilée: de ses veines arrachées jaillit un large flot de sang.*

crop might sprout from *foedus imber*, Herrmann's gentler '*baigne*' performs an almost lustral reflex of release more consistent with the play's final lines.[54] For Artaud, seeking to cure his audience of their spiritual paralysis through a vigorous letting of stage-blood, this rain falls like a baptism.

Artaud was planning a project based on *Thyestes*, called *The Torments of Tantalus*, which never made it to the stage.[55] His notes on the production as envisaged in 1934 demonstrate just how compatible Artaud found Seneca to be with his artistic vision:

> All the great myths of the past cloak pure forces… Antonin Artaud wants to try to interpret a mythical tragedy so that it expresses its natural force on stage, and thus restores theatre to its true goal […]
>
> They [the audience] will not resist the effects of physical surprise, the dynamism of cries and violent gestures, visual explosions, and a whole series of calculated tetanic effects intended to act directly upon the physical sensibility of the spectator.[56]

Importantly, Artaud does not in fact respond to Greek 'humanistic' tragedy so much as to Senecan excess.[57] In a similar fashion to his Orientalising appropriation of Balinese dance to serve as a springboard for denouncing text-based theatre, he projects his desire for an (imaginary) Nietzschean, pre-classical world onto works of a completely different period.[58]

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[54] Compare the rain that falls at the end of Julie Taylor's production of Stravinsky's *Oedipus*; also the rain that falls on Ian's ruined face at the end of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*.

[55] Artaud (1968) [1956], 235n.76: we know about the *Thyestes* translation because A. mentions it in a letter to Barrault, offering to 'read you my tragedy, *The Torment of Tantalus*.' Corti comments that 'This seems to indicate that Antonin Artaud had finished the work. Unfortunately, the text of this adaptation seems lost for good', although some extant notes imagine a production in Marseille.

[56] [*Tous les Grands Mythes du Passé dissimulent des forces pures… Antonin Artaud veut tenter par le truchement d'une tragédie Mythique d'en dire sur la scène les forces naturelles, et de rendre ainsi le théâtre à sa véritable destination […] Elle ne résiste pas à des effets de surprise physique, au dynamisme des cris et de gestes violents, à des explosions visuelles, à tout un ensemble d'effets tét*anisants *venus à point nommé et utilisés pour agir de façon directe sur la sensibilité du spectateur.*] (1964, *O.C.*II, 185-87).

[57] Innes (1993), 123: Brook's 'choice of Seneca's *Oedipus* (rather than Sophocles' humanistic version).'

[58] On Artaud's use of Nietzsche, see Jamieson (2007), 21 and Sánchez Léon (2007), 20.

Atavistic ritual gives Cruelty a much cleaner pedigree than decadent Roman sophistication. Sontag refers to this as 'nostalgia for a past so eclectic as to be quite unlocatable historically.'[59] Such fantasy may quite reasonably stimulate the poetic imagination, but Artaud is not the only one to deliberately overlook the provenance of his source; perhaps the grossest elision occurs in a recent monograph by Sánchez Léon, who collapses all ancient tragedy into one undifferentiated antecedent, visible in Artaud's work as *les thèmes grecs (y compris Sénèque*).[60] The 'pure forces' which Artaud perceives operating through Seneca's drama are much more closely interwoven, more palpable and less domesticated than anthropomorphic Attic gods *ex machina* and amorphous Fate. *Thyestes*' zodiac ode (789-874), for example, situates the action of the play within a cosmic framework of disorder, linking Atreus' crime with universal catastrophe. In Herrmann's rather breathless translation:

> *Nos coeurs tremblent, oui, tremblent, frappés d'une immense crainte, celle que l'univers ne s'écroule, fraccasse, dans l'embranlement général que prédisent les destins et que le chaos difforme n'accable à nouveau les dieux et les hommes, <enfin> que la Nature n'engloutisse à nouveau les terres, la mer qui les entoure et les astres errants qui pointillent le ciel* (cf. Sen. *Thy*. 828-34).

From Tantalus' opening soliloquy, Seneca's characters exceed mere personality, appearing rather as emblems or avatars. The Fury offers an ideal template for one of the giant effigies from Artaud's *Manifesto*: a tangible personification of (un)natural forces: vengeance, hatred, obsession. Her touch burns (*flagrat*, 98; *ardet*, 253). Tantalus' approach devastates the landscape, hunger and thirst spreading like infection as he passes. Landscape and cosmos respond organically to Seneca's characters, dissolving the boundary – perceived by Artaud as

[59] Sontag (2004), 91-92. Grotowski (2004), 61 is blunter: Artaud's interpretation of Balinese dance is 'one big misreading' (albeit a productive one).
[60] Sánchez Léon, 14 and 49-64.

artificially imposed - between the environment and human body. For Artaud, it is the 'monstrosity' of these characters which endows them with dramatic interest, which permits them to 'exist on a level which is not quite human', that is, to distort the proportions anticipated by an audience accustomed to replications of everyday behaviour, and to demonstrate the holistic reciprocity of external substance and internal selfhood.[61] Atreus' desire to be inflamed by Megaera, to surpass the limit of human criminality (*non satis magno meum ardet furore pectus, / impleri iuvat maiore monstro,* 252-53), gives him a stature comparable to the grotesque figures in Cruelty scenarios such as *The Conquest of Mexico* or *The Spurt of Blood*, and enables him to transcend what Artaud would regard as 'psychological' theatre.

Various other aspects of *Thyestes* are also conducive to Cruelty.[62] Artaud sees the structure of the play as 'a paroxysm of violent action,' and indeed – like *Oedipus*' – the rhythm of the second half in particular is one of escalating shocks: the sacrificial butchery of Thyestes' sons is followed immediately by the zodiac ode; the end of the world, but then Atreus enters, exultant, *aequalis astris gradior* [...] *bene est, abunde est, iam satis est*, surely? *Sed cur satis est? pergam*! We are gagging, but there is more: Thyestes, bibulous and lachrymose, blubbers for his sons, and their heads are brought out;[63] but still there is one final anagnorisis to come, the revelation that Thyestes' own stomach has become his sons' grave. This brings no release, however, no suicide or exile or redress, as *clausum nefas / sine exitu luctatur* (1041-42), sucking the play back down into its own terrible cavity. At the banquet, Thyestes lets himself go with possibly the most notorious belch in Latin literature, as

[61] *Le génie propre de la logique païenne primitive est une vision non dualiste qui établait des relations analogiques entre tous les plans de la réalité… Elle implique une vision unitaire du monde où sont constamment reliés le macrocosme et le microcosme*. Sánchez Léon, 28.

[62] Sellin (1968), 35-36 comments that 'It may well have been Artaud's intention to stage such passages as the slaughter of the boys and perhaps Tantalus' description of his punishment,' stripping them down to images suitable for a Cruelty scenario.

[63] Herrmann supplies the stage direction, *découvrant les têtes des enfants*; it is possible that other body parts are revealed as well, given Thyestes' remark at 1038-39 that *abscisa cerno capita et avulses manus / et rupta fractis cruribus vestigia*.

gleefully observed by Atreus: *eructat. O me caelitum excelsissimum, regumque regem*! (911-12); or, in Herrmann's translation, *Il rote. O je suis le plus élevé des dieux, le roi des tous les rois*! One king in particular comes to mind in this line: the belching, shitting, verbally incontinent monarch of excess, *Ubu Roi*, whose creator gave his name to Artaud's first production company, the Surrealist Théâtre Alfred Jarry. This, then, is another element of Seneca's *Thyestes*, more than of any other ancient tragedy, which undermines classical corporeality. Cooking, eating – overeating – drunkenness, indigestion, the bloated stomach: these are the typical stuff of comedy and satire, not tragedy, but they feed most satisfyingly into Artaud's program of upsetting sensory decorum.[64] A final example is the sacrificial grove, which even in Seneca is composed of soundscape: *gemere ferales deos* (668), *catenis… excussis sonat* (669), *ululantque manes* (670), *latratu… trino remugit* (675-76), *ingenti sono* (680), *immugit specus vocem deo solvente* (681-82). This supplies a catalogue of stimuli for Cruelty's sonic score, which comprises shrieks and chanting, percussion and groans, amplification and dissonance. Artaud translates Seneca's visceral language into an equally visceral sensory bombardment, recognising its affective properties but misrecognising the potential of their formal poetic medium.

Although *Tantalus* remained unrealised, in 1935 Artaud adapted and directed *The Cenci*. This venture became his sole application of Cruelty in performance. By all accounts, Artaud's *Cenci* was as much of an artistic failure as it was an inspirational triumph.[65] One of the major discrepancies between *The Cenci's* conception and its outcome was the theatre in which it was staged. Cruelty theoretically demanded a bare hangar or warehouse, stripped of any resemblance to an auditorium, with the audience seated in the centre surrounded by

[64] On Artaud's use of Jarry, see Koos (1994). On food and genre, see Gowers (1993).
[65] Curran (1970), 237. See Jamieson (2007), 49 and Esslin (1976), 40-42 on the multiple reasons for the season's failure. Grotowski (2004), 60 writes that 'Artaud left no concrete technique behind him, indicated no method. He left visions, metaphors,' thus leaving an "empty space" in which future directors could attempt to realise them. See also Sontag (1994), 94 and Esslin (1976), 10.

three-dimensional action.[66] What Artaud was able to obtain, in fact, was the Théâtre Folies-Wagram, a music-hall encrusted with nineteenth-century kitsch.[67] Although the set attempted to compensate, being constructed out of scaffolding and platforms which one reviewer called 'reminiscent of a giant prison palace by Piranese,'[68] it was impossible in such a venue to perform the radical overhaul of the actor/audience relationship which Artaud envisaged.

Like the preface to *Thyestes*, the notes which accompany Artaud's text promise that the play will deliver a personification of natural forces. He invokes storms, tidal waves, lightning bolts, volcanic eruption and planetary gravity as metaphors for *The Cenci*'s tragic action; instead of just portraying a sordid family saga, it was designed to tap into these universal imperatives.[69] Artaud's Count declares outright: *Je crois et je suis une force de la nature… Je ne saurais résister aux forces qui brûlent de se ruer en moi* (1.1, p17).[70] Like Atreus, Cenci functions as an instrument rather than an agent of rage, a kind of colossal puppet mechanically inflicting pain on others while unable to exert self-control. Artaud attempted *de faire parler, non des hommes, mais des êtres; des êtres qui sont chacun comme de grandes forces qui s'incarnent… Il semble qu'on les entende mugir, tourner, brandir leurs instincts ou leurs vices, passer comme de grandes tempêtes* (*Preface*, p8).[71] In this respect, Artaud was certainly pursuing a senecan aesthetic.

The script Artaud adapted from Shelley is inexplicably stilted and incompatible with the premises of Cruelty. Unlike Shelley's *Cenci*, it is in prose, and often drops into a banal literalism. Instead of binding up her symbolically charged hair, for example, Beatrice uses her final lines to inform the audience that she fears she may have ended by resembling her father,

[66] Artaud (2010) [1964], 68-69.
[67] 'An ugly old theatre with hideously tasteless decoration.' Esslin (1976), 40-41
[68] Quoted in Innes (1993), 76.
[69] Curran (1970), 240: 'The ultimate cruelty is the cosmic machinery in which all men are bound and all are victim.'
[70] ['I feel – I know – that I am a force of nature… How can I resist the forces burning within me, bursting out of me?'] (All *Cenci* translations are by Simon Watson-Taylor).
[71] ['to give speech not just to men but to *beings*, each of whom is the incarnation of great forces… One should be able to hear these beings roaring, brandishing their instincts or their vices, passing like great storms']

making explicit the anti-moral teased out by Shelley's courtroom exchanges. Also made explicit is the act of incestuous rape itself. Artaud flattens the peaks and chasms of Shelley's linguistic battleground into a dull plain of expression; Beatrice has no difficulty stating flatly that *Cenci, mon père, m'a polluée […] Tout est atteint. Tout.* She even makes the assertion, unthinkable for Shelley's heroine, that *J'irai sur les places publiques dire que mon père m'a déshonorée* (3.1, p43).[72] In place of the sensory delusions suffered by Shelley's Beatrice – the choking mist and the sinking floor – Artaud's relates a rather reductive nightmare in which a wild animal pursues her as she flees, naked, through dark cellars (3.1, p39). Her physical integrity is not dissolved; her perception of external reality is not disrupted; her ability to frame her trauma verbally is not impaired. Somehow, Artaud has recognised these potential ingredients of Cruelty in Shelley but failed to retain them in the version he produced. His antagonism towards formal poetics drove him to reject Shelley's (senecan) verbal density, but forced him in the process to surrender the very hyperreality that it generates.

In place of poetic utterance, Artaud exploited images and soundscape. The *coups de théâtre* include the first attempt on Cenci's life, in which *On voit les formes des assassins qui jaillissent comme des toupies et se croisent dans un éclair* (3.2, p.45).[73] The action strikes the audience in disjointed bursts, intercut with disorienting blackouts and deafening gunshots, finally plunging into total darkness. Beatrice then incites the assassins to make a second attempt by wrapping them up 'like mummies' (*comme des momies*) in the trailing bands of their garments and thrusting blades into their stiffened fists (4.1, p.48). The observation in one press release that certain choreography 'seems to revive the dance-pantomime of the Romans' may have been nothing more than a casual historical elision, but perhaps contains

[72] ['Cenci my father has polluted me… All is tainted, all […] I would gladly stand in the public squares and cry out that my father has dishonoured me.']
[73] ['the outlines of assassins can be seen surging forth, spinning like tops and passing each other in the illumination of a flash of lightning.']

more truth than the reporter could have suspected.[74] Artaud's visual onslaught continues in the final act's stylised depiction of torture:

> *Au plafond du théâtre une roue tourne comme sur un axe. Béatrice, suspendue par les cheveux… marche selon l'axe de la roue. Tous les deux ou trois pas qu'elle fait, un cri monte avec un bruit de treuil, de roue qu'on tourne, ou de poutres éclartées, venant d'un coin différent de la scène. La prison dégage le bruit d'une usine en plein mouvement* (4.2, p.55).[75]

This stage direction also exemplifies Artaud's other major innovation, the use of a constant integrated soundtrack to prompt his audience's sensory responses. Artaud's score was composed by Robert Desormière, utilising the ear-splitting distortion recommended in the Manifesto.[76] Sounds with thematic significance such as footsteps and peals of bells punctuate the dialogue, acquiring the status of invisible participants. Mummified assassins and muffled bells, wild geometric dance sequences, dialogue consisting of sighs, a factory-like prison where a murderess hangs by her hair, shrieking music, a pagan orgy, a violent storm:[77] Artaud extracted a pageant of dissonant elements from Shelley's play, but did not altogether dispense with the text, clinging instead to an unnecessarily watered-down version representative neither of Shelley nor of Cruelty. Caught between his conviction that language betrays theatre and the need to make his first foray into Cruelty comprehensible, Artaud compromised, and succeeded only in staging a play that fell tragically short of both affective ideals.

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[74] Maurice Dabadie: *Echo de Paris*, April 24 1935, in Blin et al. (1972).
[75] ['From the stage's ceiling, a wheel is revolving on its invisible axis. Beatrice, attached to the wheel by her hair… follows the direction set by the revolving wheel. Every few steps she takes, screams, accompanied by the sound of turning winches, grinding wheels or wooden beams being split apart, can be heard coming from different directions around the stage. The prison sounds just like a busy factory.']
[76] Sellin (1968), 122; Blin et al. (1972), 97.
[77] Primary sources pertaining to the *mise en scène* and rehearsal process are collected in Blin et al. (1972).

If there was any point at which Seneca was to have been revived as a major player in the development of twentieth-century tragedy, it would have been this. Had there been a director-theorist capable of receiving senecanism and re-launching it as a significant theatrical movement, it would have been Artaud. The vectors were established; the moment crystallized; latent senecanism reacted with incipient Cruelty in the crucible of *The Cenci*, and should have (could have, would have) transformed theatrical practice. The time was academically ripe, as well: T.S. Eliot's 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation' had recently been published (1927), closely following F.L. Lucas' 1922 monograph *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy*; Otto Regenbogen's groundbreaking recuperation of Seneca as *the* dramatist of the intolerable, '*Schmerz und Tod in den Tragodien Senecas*', appeared in 1928. Had *The Cenci* hit the headlines, it would have re-ignited a recognisably Senecan spark. Everything converged.

*The Cenci* played a handful of shows to dwindling houses, and closed under a battering of hostile reviews. Artaud, who shortly afterwards suffered the nervous breakdown that ended his professional career, never attempted another production. The moment passed, and it had been fumbled. An inappropriate venue, an inexperienced cast, and the lack of adequate resources rendered the initiative stillborn. Additionally, as I have argued, Artaud was mistaken in believing that poetic discourse is incapable of viscerally penetrating the auditor, a premise fundamental to the senecan aesthetic. This conviction seems, in fact, to fall back into an unhelpful dualism that separates the authentic, spontaneous body from the devious, language-warped mind. The version of the senecan aesthetic that passed into the twentieth-century avant-garde thus remained fragmented and unacknowledged.

Conclusion

Artaud came to *The Cenci* via Seneca, fresh from *Thyestes* and *Le Théâtre et la Peste*. Everything which excited him in Senecan drama, and prompted him to accommodate its content to the dramaturgy of Cruelty, was transferred instead to Shelley. What he found most valuable in *The Cenci*, then, were precisely those qualities which place it in the senecan tradition. Curran briefly notes the 'ritualised despair' common to Seneca and Shelley, but does not undertake any further examination of the similarities in tragic form and relationship to language.[78] As I have shown, *The Cenci* contains several points of contact with Seneca, including the intense verbal expressionism, the poetics of trauma that make it (like *Penthesilea*) a *Hypertragödie*, and thus resistant to strictly mimetic performance. Abnormal experiences can only be conveyed through metaphor, not literalism; metaphor, as Peterfreund interprets Shelley's linguistic philosophy, prevents the complacent assimilation of all experience to a single representational order, maintaining both the vitality of language and respect for otherness.[79]

Artaud, on the other hand, mistrusted language altogether, and therefore attempted to replace it with soundscape and incantation, seeking estrangement through the creation of a semantic vacuum rather than through Shelleyan semantic transfiguration. In this respect, he lost touch with the senecan aesthetic and its rhetorical deployment of the spoken word as not only plastic and sonic but also deeply sensual in its evocation of meanings. The naturalistic, text-based theatre of the late nineteenth century that Artaud despised had no place for language deployed in this way; dramatic speech, it seemed to him, had become capable only of telling trivial psychological stories, not clothing great metaphysical myths. A full recuperation of verse drama under the mantle of Cruelty was therefore unthinkable at this point. As Artaud acquired the status of martyr-prophet, however, the repercussions of his

[78] Curran (1970), 246 n.187.
[79] Peterfreund (1991), 188; cf. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* in Leader & O'Neill (2003), 676 & 681-82.

senecanism spread well beyond *The Cenci*, resurfacing in the work of Peter Brook, Jorge Lavelli, and above all Jean-Louis Barrault. As the next chapter goes on to demonstrate, this subsequent generation of directors returned to the verbal density of Seneca's plays with Cruelty in mind.

## Chapter 8

## SENECA IN '68

Artaudian theory made a substantial contribution to a series of twentieth-century productions of Seneca. Apart from Jean-Louis Barrault's 1942 *Phèdre*, these cluster around the late 1960s: Jorge Lavelli's 1967 *Medea*, Roger Blin's *Thyeste* (scheduled for May '68, but forestalled by the Paris riots), and Peter Brook's 1968 *Oedipus*. Stephen Harrison identifies the 1960s as a period when Seneca made a comeback in both scholarship and performance, but confines his study largely to literary aspects of Seneca's English translations.[1] By investigating the Senecan revival from the perspective of its avant-garde roots, it is also possible to identify the phenomenon as part of a broader transformation in practitioners' attitudes towards dramatic language. The directors examined here do not seem attracted to the violence and sensationalism of senecan Cruelty so much as to the potential for corporeal involvement in senecan poetics. As they sought to manifest Artaud's vision of theatre as ritual, Barrault, Lavelli and Brook all turned back to Seneca, in the process reinvesting articulate speech with the self-immolation perceived in pure physicality.

Despite the concurrent resurgence of academic interest, Seneca continued to be warily excluded, with few exceptions, from the "performative turn" in classical scholarship. This reluctance to engage with the abject strangeness of Senecan dramaturgy was given firm philological foundations by Zwierlein's *Rezitationsdramen Senecas*, which asserted methodically and categorically that the so-called "tragedies" were rhetorical bricolage, not continuous dramas. From the standpoint of naturalistic theatre, Zwierlein's argument is almost convincing. However, set against the paradigm shift in theatrical practice (and, one could add, in accompanying theories of performance) which had released the actor's body and voice from isomorphic representation, it loses ground. The second part of this chapter

[1] Harrison (2009).

puts Zwierlein in context. By revisiting Seneca's brief revival in the late 1960s the roots of the current academic agenda can be uncovered, and its unrealised alternatives laid out for speculation.

Deeper into language

Jean-Louis Barrault first came to Artaud's attention when he presented his research into mime techniques in *Autour d'une Mère*, a *tour de force* of physical theatre stemming from collaborations with Étienne Decroux. Originally cast in *The Cenci*, Barrault quit after an altercation with the notoriously difficult leading actress, and instead formed a bohemian artists' collective in the Rue des Grands Augustins. Artaud became its presiding genius, 'the royal representative of this anarchist nobility.'[2] His influence on the younger theatre-maker at this time was so profound that Barrault later commented, 'I was to undergo Artaud… to the point of resembling him exactly.'[3] The two men corresponded extensively, both in Paris and later during Artaud's 1937 sojourn in Mexico.[4] Appointed as a *Sociétaire* (life member) of the Comédie Française in 1942, Barrault began to synthesise his classical training and specialisation in mime with an Artaudian vision of "total theatre". This informed both his theories on the science of performance and the nature of the productions he directed. One of his first projects for the Comédie Française was Racine's Senecan verse-drama *Phèdre* (1942), to which he applied senecan principles derived and developed from Artaud's work.

Barrault's major departure from Artaud resides in his return to the written dramatic text. The unmediated, quasi-musical impact of vocalisation on the auditor's body, which Artaud restricted to glossolalia and inarticulate cries, Barrault restored to the phonemic patterns of spoken language, even (or perhaps especially) to the measured elegance of

[2] Barrault (1949), 47.
[3] Barrault (1949), 48. (Trans. Wall.)
[4] Frank (1952).

Racinian tragedy. He maintained that speech, like gesture, is 'a plastic exercise of the body,' grounded in the same muscular precision as mime: 'Speech should be regarded as the most skilled physical expression of which the human being is capable,' he wrote in *Reflections on the Theatre* (1949). Activating Artaud's dream of a holistic physicality for the performer, as laid out primarily in 'An Affective Athleticism',[5] Barrault began to develop a way of accommodating the interpretive burden placed on a modern actor who takes on classical tragedy. Displaced from their original seventeenth-century production context, works like *Phèdre* demand constant revolutions in technique if they are to make ongoing dramaturgical sense.[6] According to Barrault, naturalism cannot cope with the highly contrived crisis-states distilled into classical tragedy.

> A tragic actor, whose acting is highly stylized, who speaks in alexandrines and evolves within a crystallized, complicated but symmetrical situation, who obeys an arithmetical rhythm both with voice and body – this sort of actor must cultivate the faculty of control, for without it he will never carry his Character through to the bitter end.[7]

This 'faculty of control' refers to a flawless geometry of movement coupled with a virtuosic command of vocal tone. This may not in fact seem so far removed from Quintilian or Diderot, but the rationale given by Barrault betrays Artaudian roots in its premise that sound acts psychosomatically:

[5] Artaud (2010) [1964], 93-99.
[6] Barrault was not the only director to respond to this insight – Peter Brook, Andrei Serban, Jonathan Miller, Jerzy Grotowski and Richard Schechner have expressed similar ideas – but he was one of the first. Barthes (1972) critiques the historical *mélange* of his 1955 *Oresteia*.
[7] Barrault (1949), 124. (Trans. Wall.)

> Sometimes a vowel, a consonant or an interplay of vowels and consonants can have such a physical and direct impact that the listener feels the deep meaning of those words before he has time to grasp such meaning by rational processes. Thanks to the sound value of vowels and consonants, speech has an incantatory and magic power which is of the greatest importance in the theatre.[8]

For Barrault, this 'incantatory and magical power' is only enhanced, rather than eroded, by the semantic denotation that follows hard upon the initial physical assault. In this way, the text and the audience can reach a rapprochement despite the ontological gulf between them, via the ebb and flow through human tissue of Racine's particularly musical language.

Music supplies much of Barrault's vocabulary for conceptualising the effects he desires from the delivery of *Phèdre*. He regards the play as a whole as 'symphonic', scored for eight voices – Phèdre as the dramatic soprano, Hippolyte as tenor, Thesée baritone, etc – and his notes to individual lines describe them in terms of orchestral instrumentation. Ismene, for example, interrupts Aricie's romantic 'delirium of violins' like a cool clarinet note, and Oenone echoes Phèdre's agitated movement 'as the tremolo of double-basses follows the phrases of an orchestra'.[9] Barrault marks in crescendos and diminuendos, changes in tempo and timbre, even the points where significant breaths are drawn, explaining how the minutest details accumulate to enable the great shifts of gear that give the tragedy its elevation. Elevation, for Barrault, signifies more than rarefied discourse. In a memorable simile, he compares Racine's *récitative* – the senecan soliloquy that forms the climax of each scene – to an aeroplane taking off: the huge mechanical effort, the gathering of unstoppable momentum

[8] Barrault (1959), 45. ['*Quelque fois une voyelle, une consonne, le jeu de plusieurs voyelles ou de plusieurs consonnes, frappent le spectateur si directement, si physiquement, si plastiquement que celui-ci saisi et ressenti se sens profond d'une groupe de mots bien avant que, par association d'idées, il ait perçu intellectuellement le sens de ces mots. Grâce à la valeur phonique des voyelles et des consonnes, le verbe a une puissance incantatoire et magique qui, au théâtre, doit apparaître au premier plan*.']
[9] Barrault (1946), 21-22; 34; 171; 95.

that results in an apparently miraculous (but in reality technically accomplished) defiance of gravity, attaining a heartstopping plateau of weightlessness before the soliloquy begins its controlled but inevitable descent. Each *récitative* describes this parabola, this *courbe*, and the play has its own overarching lift-off, glide and landing, a flight-path musically described. Barrault stresses, however, that this does not imply an operatic delivery of the lines, but rather a musician's scrupulous observation of the rhythms and intonation scored into the dramatic form, and a musician's sensitivity to the timbre of his corporeal instrument.

*Phèdre*'s dialogue constructs its setting as enclosed, claustrophobic, inescapable.[10] Barrault expresses this not in his *décor*, the pale, receding ribs of a vaulted palace, but in the way the his actors respond to it physically: striving to escape or crushed by the barometric pressure. An unnatural silence, Barrault writes, weighs down on Trézène; one stifles, one suffocates; Trézène is '*un lieu irrespirable*,' an "unbreathable" atmosphere. It is also hot, sweltering under the constant presence of the sun, filtered through shutters so its rays probe and finger the set. Oppressed by such relentless radiance, you seek out shade, a place to hide from the light, but even the shadows have *tonalités chaudes*, appearing at times blood-red.[11] The play becomes feverish, its temperature soaring with each recitative and its pulse beating more and more rapidly, until it enters the terminal delirium of Act 4. Barrault accompanies this general interpretation with specific instructions as to how the actors are to breathe, move, hold themselves, and otherwise relate to the space in order to convey this state. Additionally, he follows Artaud's suggestion of using lighting to induce sensations of heat: the single ray of sunrise illuminating Hippolyte's entrance becomes the harsh brilliance of midday in Act 2, its evening glow left silently 'vibrating in the palace' as Oenone exits to her death.[12]

Characters also absorb their surrounding world in other respects. Barrault explains that his *décor* is left so bare because the roles themselves contain environmental elements;

[10] See above, Ch. 4 pp167-69.
[11] Barrault (1946), 36-37.
[12] Barrault (1946), 73; 103-105; 175.

Venus burns inside Phèdre, scorching her entrails, a 'scorpion' devours Hippolyte, and Neptune, he stresses, is *within* Thésée (*dans,* italics original). 'The forest, archery, javelins, the chariot, the preparations for a departure constantly deferred,' writes Barrault, 'all this, is Théramène.' Meanwhile Oenone contains 'the ominous flight of birds, Destiny itself, ancient mourning, the taste of oil, the heavy perfumes that speak of the Orient, pagan superstition, the carrion-crow of evil.'[13] Phèdre herself, when she enters, appears as the sensual avatar of high summer:

> In Phèdre, it is no longer spring. It is the summer and this summer is at its most torrid point. Phèdre is at the midsummer of her life. She is flowering. She is ripe for harvest. She is a hot and fragrant fruit which splits all over in its juicy efflorescence. She is covered in a moisture that makes her sticky. Phèdre is the month of August…[14]

While it may not be possible to "play" August, or Destiny, or a chariot, in any literal or mimetic fashion, these images provide invaluable information for an actor developing a non-naturalistic role such as those in Phèdre, a role which exceeds psychology and subsumes the figurative under its representational remit.

Another way in which Barrault's characters resemble Seneca's is their frequent lapses in autonomous consciousness, their retreat from a functional awareness of their immediate surroundings. Previous chapters have discussed the extent to which Seneca's most notorious protagonists – Medea, Atreus, Phaedra – are victims or instruments of external forces, Schlegel's 'colossal marionettes'. Barrault's favourite comparison is to the sleepwalker, the

[13] Barrault (1946), 38.
[14] Barrault (1946), 87. ['*Dans Phèdre, il n'y a plus de printemps. C'est l'été et cet été-là en est à la période la plus brûlante. Phèdre est à la "canicule" de sa vie. Elle est éclose. Elle est mûre pour la moisson. C'est un fruit odorant et chaud qui craquelle de partout dans sa poussée juteuse. Elle est couverte d'une moiteur qui poise. Phèdre, c'est le mois d'âout*…']

*somnambule*, unconscious and yet active, motivated by a waking dream.[15] In Phèdre's seduction scene, as she approaches Hippolyte through the labyrinth, Barrault makes it clear that she does not control of her own movements: 'Phèdre… does not advance voluntarily on Hippolyte (this would give an intolerably confused impression of menace), but if she advances, it is because Hippolyte retreats *voluntarily*, and that *involuntarily*, he moves her (*il s'animate*)… She advances despite herself' (p125). Phèdre's conflict with desire is externalised in her muscles and her orientation. Meanwhile, Barrault elicits from this passage an almost synaesthesic sensory appeal, not only visible in the actress' sinuous movement and audible in her husky voice, but also haptic and olfactory: 'her skin prickles with heat, the palms of her hands are moist. The air is imbued with her scent; one perceives the "taste" that she has.' Even if such imaginary sensations were limited to Marie Bell (Barrault's Phèdre) or even to Barrault himself, this nevertheless represents a notable instance of Senecan text received as phenomenological impressions.

Finally, Barrault recognises the ability of heightened discourse (in this case, those alexandrine passages whose effect is based on sound and rhythm rather than semantics) to coax an audience away from 'prosaic reality' and induce submission to their 'hypnotic influence'. These passages occur mainly during recitative, but can prepare for its take-off, as well; they 'raise the temperature' of a scene to the level necessary to enter delirium, or the state of waking dream common to sleepwalking, high fever and – in the senecan economy of passions – erotic or murderous desire. According to Barrault,

> The primordial quality of the *période* is rightly an impressionistic quality. Its virtue is incantatory. Because of the selective succession of syllables and rhythms, it has the

[15] Barrault (1946), 36; 83; 93; 137; 167.

> power to "transform" the atmosphere, to prepare the environment, to draw the situation towards this other "reality".[16]

Unlike Artaud, who proposed that the purifying wildfire of theatrical plague could only be ignited non-verbally, Barrault derives it instead from the already-affective sonic material on offer in Racine's script and recuperates the alexandrine as incantation, as theatrical ritual. In the alexandrine, as in the classical trimeter or the Shakespearean pentameter, the iamb replicates the heartbeat, and as such already exerts a strong organic attraction.[17] Barrault's perception that language itself has the power to alter consciousness in a psychosomatic way may be equally applied to Senecan tragedy and the senecan aesthetic, theatre inherent in the (spoken) word; and in fact, insofar as Barrault's Racine's *Phèdre* constitutes a translation and therefore production of Seneca's *Phaedra*, his *mise en scène* provides an invaluable account of Senecan tragedy experienced professionally from within.

Two decades later, when Barrault was in charge of rejuvenating the Odéon-Théâtre-de-France as the Comédie's more experimental double, he included in his 1967 season a production of Seneca's *Medea*, in a new translation by Jean Vauthier and directed by young Argentinian expatriate Jorge Lavelli. Having taken a paternal interest in Lavelli's work, Barrault regarded him as something of a protégé.[18] He declared himself deeply impressed with the production, which in his opinion was executed 'perfectly'.[19] Both directors shared a commitment to bringing out the musicality of dramatic text, and because for Barrault *le théâtre s'addresse à la poitrine, à la sensation, à l'affectivité* rather than addressing itself to the intellect, the 'symphonic' composition of Lavelli's *Médée* particularly appealed.

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[16] ['*La qualité primordiale de la période est justement une qualité impressioniste. Sa vertu est incantatoire. Par la succession choisie de syllabes et de rhythmes elle a le pouvoir de "métamorphoser" l'atmosphère, de préparer le climat, d'entraîner la situation vers cette autre "réalité"*.'] Barrault (1946), 58.
[17] Barrault (1946), 68 compares the alexandrine to a heartbeat. For further details, see also Barrault (1959), 39-48.
[18] Whitton (1987), 154-55; Mignon (1999), 281-82.
[19] Barrault (1974), 301.

The climax of Lavelli's *Médée*,[20] in which Medea stabs her second child in Jason's presence, is preserved on film. Medea appears on a raised platform above the heads of the clustered chorus, whose stiff glistening tabards form a wall. Jason faces us. His armour glitters like metal scales. His eyes are hollow. He speaks in a stricken monotone, repeating the ominous words, "*Medea. Mon fils. Medea. Mon fils tué*?" He sinks to his knees in a slow, deliberate glide. Neither is hysterical. Both speak with unwavering certainty, echoing each other's words, colluding to the last despite the mournful fall at the end of each phrase that takes them closer to the brink. Medea presses her son decisively against her; he does not struggle. She raises her arm like a claw or a salute, and begins to invoke her appointed destiny, implicitly calling on her ancestor, the sun: "*Jour… jour éclatant*…" in an ascending scale, long semitones sustained until the voice cracks and quivers, at which point it reaches for the next inevitable note, as regular as the sunrise, and as unstoppable. This murder cannot be prevented, merely suspended. "*Tu es là*," she says, with regret. The chorus begin a low hum as Jason bends backwards like a bow, offering his own breast to the knife. "*Tue-moi*," he intones, "*tue-moi*…"

"*Me demandes-tu la pitié*?" Medea replies, in the same emotionless drawl; and then her hand falls. Jason howls. The clip ends.[21]

One of the most striking aspects of both Lavelli's work and that of actress Maria Casarès (Medea), is their use of voice. Lavelli, like Barrault, was working in the tradition of total theatre, creating a ritualistic, 'ceremonial' atmosphere by integrating sonic, visual and choreographic components. Like Barrault, he also applied musical principles to a verbal text, treating the script like a score. According to Whitton, 'His analysis of a play is based on a detailed study of the text but what he extracts from it is not literal meaning so much as its expressive rhythm: the interplay of strong and weak moments, the dynamic states of

[20] The production was entitled *Médée*, but Vauthier's script retains the title *Medea*.
[21] http://www.boutique.ina.fr/video/art-et-culture/arts-du-spectacle/ RXF05005371/ page-artistique-jean-louis-barrault-a-propos-de-medee.fr.html

crescendo and decrescendo, the exchanges between soloist and chorus.'[22] Lavelli himself comments, 'Once language has been freed from its various limitations (stereotyped definitions) it can arouse certain feelings within the spectator's being… It can be concretized, transferred into a living and malleable element intrinsic to the play itself.'[23] Lavelli later went on to direct opera, which he regarded not as an art form with separate conventions but rather as a similar kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[24] Spoken text demanded the same scrupulous attention to rhythm, dynamics and tone, not to create the impression of lifelike discourse but to exploit the full musical range of the human voice. Like Artaud, he sought to release the voice from habitual cadences of everyday speech; but unlike Artaud, he used as his blueprint the vowels and consonants already specified in the script.

Maria Casarès portrayed Medea with such incandescent ferocity that one reviewer saw her as a symbol of nuclear holocaust.[25] Her voice attracted particular attention. Lavelli recalls her discovering the text's musicality, 'negotiating the different registers, the different tonalities, the tempo… It was almost as if she were singing onstage.'[26] Director Luis Pasqual also singles out Casarès' voice, commenting that 'She had a unique way of breathing… She embodied and breathed the texts with the same pounding pulse… with which they were written.'[27] Pasqual does not mean that Casarès' breath was literally synchronized with that of the playwright, but rather that she drew on the written word for a physical impulse, the rhythm of her breath, which then informed her embodiment of Vauthier's (Seneca's) heroine: Medea, entirely a function of language, 'stalking the stage like a wounded warrior queen,'[28] *une créature droite sortie du chaos*.[29] The discordant soundtrack, scored by Iannis Xenakis,

[22] Whitton (1987), 191.
[23] Quoted in Whitton (1987), 191.
[24] Whitton (1987), 209.
[25] Quoted in Delgado (2003), 104-05..
[26] Quoted in Bradby & Delgado (2002), 229.
[27] Quoted in Bradby & Delgado (2002), 214.
[28] Delgado (2003), 104.
[29] Quoted in Delgado (2003), 104.

also contributed to the atmosphere. Episodes of rhythmic chanting alternate with hysterical, staccato stutters or sinister drones. Brass rolls like a thunderclap under strings like high-pitched wailing. There is nowhere to rest, just inexorable momentum, like running over sharp stones. The dissonance grates against nerves already set on edge by the unpredictable pummelling of the drum-beat, an aural sandblasting that nonetheless keeps you listening, straining for the resolution perpetually deferred.

Vauthier's text lends itself to theatrical ritual. One of its singular devices is the punctuation Vauthier uses to indicate the continuity of thought or action between the spoken words: ellipsis, slash, dash, exclamation mark, indices of non-verbal intensity. While retaining a substantial proportion of Seneca's dialogue, Vauthier also contrives to leave space for the unspoken. Paratextual markers in a script, such as the layout of a page and the typography, can provide directors and performers with valuable information about pace, scale and distance; whether a passage is slender or sprawling, fractured or fluent, inhibited or expansive. Annotations such as Vauthier's have no universal correspondence to action, but function as offers made to the performer's intuition.[30] The televised scene discussed above contains a high proportion of paratextual stimuli in Vauthier's script:

MEDEA

Ce jour, jour éclatant / !___

Jour tu es là…! ...! ...

Instant.

O vengeance justicière.

Un certain temps m'est accordé.

[30] On page layout as a paratextual resource for the actor, McAuley 1999, 230-32.

JASON

___ Tue-moi. Tue-moi! _____

Veuille bien me tuer….. Hâte-toi. Hâte-toi.

MEDEA

Me demandes-tu la pitié?

- Jason!.....

C'en est fait . . . . . .

. . . . . .

O mon ressentiment /

Je ne pouvais t'offrir d'avantage.

. . . . . .

- Jason.

Jason l'ingrat / regarde.

Reconnais-tu ton épouse?

. . . . . (pp108-09. Ellipses in original).[31]

At the end of the play, after Seneca's final line is translated in its entirety, Vauthier adds two more lines of concentrated emptiness, prescribing unspecified activity:

JASON

-Va, va! _____ Va!_____

Va!! Traverse les plus hautes régions du ciel!

[31] [MEDEA: 'This day, bright day! / Day, you are here…! / Right now. / O just vengeance. / Time is on my side. / JASON: Kill me. Kill me! / You should want to kill me. Strike. Strike. / MEDEA: Are you asking for my pity? / Jason! It is done. / O my bitterness / I have nothing more to offer you. / Jason. / Ungrateful Jason, look. / Do you recognise your wife?']

En atteste qu'il n'y a pas de dieux dans l'espace

où tu t'élèves!....! _____ !

_____ ! (p109).[32]

Something, the ellipses suggest, ought to be filling these gaps. Dramatic activity continues for a designated period even when the words are suppressed, or issued as a silent, paralysed scream. As in Shelley's *Cenci*, atrocity is closeted, attention drawn to the presence of what has not been said aloud, the senecan *nefas* in all its morbidly tantalizing refusal of disclosure. It implies a certain elevation, or transition into an extra-linguistic mode nevertheless not exempt from stylistic strictness. Limits have been surpassed, and yet Medea remains Medea:

Elle [*vengeance*] débordera jusqu'aux

limites de l'Univers et laissera sa lé-

gende! _____ ! _____!

……. (p52)

Despite its lower verbal density, Vauthier's *Medea* is unmistakably Seneca's. It follows the Senecan structure and scene-content, including characteristic lines and distinctive passages, from the micro-level (*Je reste. Je suis le fer et le feu! Je suis la terre et la mer et je porte la foudre*, p28) up to the macro, such as the choral ode covering the Argo's voyage. Seneca's sorcery, an evident stimulus for theatrical ritual, occurs in full, while the Messenger's speech consists only of the brief announcement that the palace is on fire. Medea represents her rage as a natural state commensurate with the tides and planetary motion, expressing the Senecan sentiment that she will see the universe in ruins as she falls. At the

[32] ['Go, go! / Go! Travel the highest regions of the sky / and prove there are no gods in the heaven / you ascend.']

moment when (like Atreus) she ought to be most satisfied with her revenge, she vacillates, but drives herself on with the imperative that *C'est maintenant que je dois être Medea*! …..! (p97). She adheres throughout to the Senecan program of surpassing former crimes in pursuit of self-fulfilment.[33]

Vauthier's translation stresses Medea's contradictory insistence on her innocence. Haunted by her former murders – Absyrtus and Pelias – she nevertheless maintains that the culpability belongs to Jason as author and beneficiary, casting herself as instrument, not agent, *made guilty* as a weapon might be implicated in murder but not held responsible. As in Seneca, then (but not in Euripides), the expiatory logic of her infanticide becomes apparent. What she desires is complete restitution, complete restoration of the innocence destroyed by the Argo's voyage.[34] Once the first child is dead,

> Désormais j'ai recouvert mon sceptre.
> Mon frère, mon père / Et la Toison d'Or
> est rendue à la Colchide! _____ !
> Maintenant je règne sur mon royaume.
> Maintenant je suis vièrge…… (p104).[35]

The keynote *vièrge* (virgin) is struck throughout Vauthier's translation: Medea committed her first crimes as a *vièrge* (p18), Creuse is the *vièrge* who has now supplanted her (p19, p106), the chorus refer to Scylla as another savage *vièrge* provoked by the Argonauts, and predict that Tethys will expose her *vièrges espaces* to future voyages of discovery (p49). Along with

[33] Seneca *Medea* 171, 566-67, 910. On the creation of Senecan persona in general, see Fitch & McElduff (2002), esp. 24-30; on Stoic aspects of Medea's self-realisation in particular, see Bartsch (2006), 255-81 esp. 256-66.
[34] This circularity, as Macintosh (2000), 12-26 points out, is also common to the versions by Grillparzer, Anouilh and Müller.
[35] 'Finally I have recovered my sceptre. / My brother, my father. And the Golden Fleece / is restored to Colchis! / Now I rule over my kingdom. / Now I am virgin, untouched.'

virginity comes innocence, the pre-lapsarian naivety of the ancestors living with *plus d'innocence* before the Argo's launch. As living testimony to Medea's criminal past, the children must be wiped out to cancel the sacrifice of Absyrtus, innocent children to appease the shade of an innocent brother (p99). *La mer, sans cesse, a vengé ces offenses* (p78), the chorus conclude, and it is Medea, *affreuse conséquence de nos audaces* (p49), who is once again cast – as a blade is cast – as executioner. Attempting to wipe out blood with consanguineous blood, she performs the act as a strict *conséquence* of Jason's own, unacknowledged criminality.

A few months later, Roger Blin (another former colleague and loyal disciple of Artaud who had appeared in the 1935 *Cenci*), prepared to stage Seneca's *Thyestes* at the Odéon. In conjunction with Lavelli's *Médée*, his project was picked up by the French press – as well as by English director Peter Brook - as representing something of a general Senecan renaissance around this time.[36] The Artaudian connection has been firmly established, most strongly by Alain Virmaux, who suggests that Blin was intending to fill in Artaud's outline of *The Torments of Tantalus*, the production sketched out and abandoned in 1934.[37] Blin, however, was using as his text the relatively conventional translation by Hugo Claus. Poirot-Delpech identifies Artaud as the ultimate inspiration behind Barrault, Lavelli and Blin, '*leur maître à tous*';[38] in fact, Blin did not attempt a wholesale realisation of Artaud's ideals, but rather made dialogic use of Artaudian material in conjunction with other theatrical forms.[39] How this *Thyestes* might have turned out, however, remains a known unknown, another closeted secret. The student revolts of May 1968 temporarily shut down the Odéon, leading to

[36] Brook (1968); Poirot-Delpech (1967); Touchard (1967).
[37] Virmaux (1970), 334 n. 111.
[38] Poirot-Delpech (1967).
[39] Virmaux (1970), 191. For the range of Blin's work, see Taylor-Baty (2007).

Barrault's resignation and leaving ghost-traces in the theatre's records of a production that never happened.[40]

It was Peter Brook who finally performed the deliberate application of Cruelty to Senecan tragedy. During 1963-65, Brook had been conducting practical experiments in Artaudian theory during the so-called "Cruelty Season", including the first attempted staging of *The Spurt of Blood* and the English premiere of Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade*, in which 'Artaudian theatricality found its near-perfect fulfilment'.[41] Like Barrault and Lavelli, however, Brook did not seek to dispense with the written text; rather, he sought to shift it away from centre stage, transforming it into another material resource, like fabric or limbs, to be subsumed into the performance as a whole. Throughout the 1960s, Brook alternated experimental work with revisionist stagings of classical drama, most provocatively *King Lear* (1962) and *The Tempest* (1968). His manifesto for theatrical reform, *The Empty Space*, was also published in 1968, calling for the abolition of 'Deadly Theatre' – tragedy dormant beneath 'the crust of Gilbert Murray and vases' -[42] and its replacement with a 'Holy Theatre' that would intoxicate and burn.[43] In May 1968, when the Paris riots aborted Blin's *Thyeste*, they also cut short the Parisian rehearsals for *Orghast* which Brook was conducting at the time.[44] On the company's return to England, Laurence Olivier offered Brook the opportunity to direct Seneca's *Oedipus* at the National Theatre. Recognising the text's Artaudian potential, Brook rejected the prose translation originally commissioned by Olivier and approached Ted Hughes for something closer to his own aesthetic goals. The ensuing collaboration resulted in one of Seneca's most commercially successful appearances, an adaptation that has now become canonical in its own right.

[40] Taylor-Baty (2007), 188. The Odéon's website still lists the play among its past productions.
[41] Grimm & Vedia (1994), 195.
[42] Brook (1968b), 50.
[43] Brook (1968a).
[44] Smith (1972), 21-23. See Williams (1988), 115 on the circumstances of Brook's appointment as director of *Oedipus* and Hughes' engagement as translator.

Hughes' poetic diction has been called muscular, concrete, earthy.[45] At that time fascinated, like Brook, with the somatic properties of vocalised sound and the ability of onomatopoeic language to dig out meaning deeply rooted in the human subconscious, he approached Seneca's text 'as the basis for a ritualistic drama about Oedipus.' Unlike Sophocles' more cerebral treatment, Seneca's was read as a primeval, visceral version of the myth, 'very barbaric, very raw'. Initially working through the Latin with a parallel text, Hughes discarded this scaffolding once he had established what he felt was the centripetal core of the play, 'something essential… this little naked knot.' [46] Rhetorical formality fell away, followed by syntax, leaving a freestanding unpunctuated torrent of verse. The spaces indicate breaths:

> nobody weeps there are no tears left the groans are for the living not the dead screaming is not mourning but torment or terror many die of terror
>
> leap screaming from windows gulp down poison stab themselves for terror
>
> fathers with roasting eyes stoke their son's bodies in the flames mothers stagger to and fro between their children's beds and the flames finally throw themselves into the flames mourners fall down beside the pyres and are thrown into the flames survivors fight for fuel even snatching burning sticks from pyres even throw their own families on top of other people's pyres
>
> it's enough if the bones are scorched

In some respects, Hughes exaggerates the anatomical specificities that give Seneca his reputation for gruesomeness: the plague-symptoms attack more organs, Oedipus gouges more

[45] West (1985); Scigaj (1991). See also discussion of the translation in Harrison (2009), 152-58.
[46] All quotes in this paragraph come from Hughes in an interview with Correy & Ravlich (1982), but cf. Stead (forthcoming), who cautions that Hughes' reflections on his translation practice exhibit an element of self-mythologizing.

viciously at his eyes. Metaphysically, too, this is a crueller universe, in which the gods are not merely indifferent but 'dead of the plague' (p21). Hughes and Brook, like Artaud, perceived Seneca's treatment not as baroque and verbose but in fact as a more supple and primal version of the Oedipus myth. This perception may be attributed to various factors. During the 1960s, corporeal presence had acquired unprecedented significance in performance as dramatic language became constituent rather than paramount. Actors, particularly in Europe, were retraining their bodies to function not as representational ciphers but as articulate subject-matter.[47] Mistrust of intellectualism and a hunger for the irrational, especially as encountered in ancient or non-Western cultural traditions, complemented this turn towards the somatic, and created a fertile bed for senecanism to take root. Whereas Sophocles' Oedipus aspires to logical interrogation, Seneca's resorts to "primitive" ritual: haruspicy, necromancy, and the choral ode to Bacchus which Hughes replaces with a partially non-verbal chant containing the refrain,

> DANCE DEATH INTO ITS HOLE
>
> DANCE DEATH INTO ITS HOLE
>
> INTO ITS HOLE
>
> ITS HOLE
>
> ITS HOLE
>
> ITS HOLE
>
> HOLE (p30).

Simultaneously, Hughes and Brook were working together on *Orghast* (1971), an international, multi-lingual theatre piece which involved the creation of an original,

[47] See de Vos (2011), 19-21 on Artaud's contribution to the post-dramatic movement; more generally, Schneider (1997), Innes (1993) and Carlson (1996) on the polarity between dramatic text and physical performance.

physiologically authentic language.[48] 'The deeper into language one goes,' writes Brook, 'the less visual/conceptual its imagery, and the more visceral/muscular its system of tensions… The deeper into language one goes, the more dramatic it becomes – the more unified with total states of being and with the expressiveness of physical action.'[49] Working with Greek and Latin texts in rehearsal for *Orghast*, including Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and *Thyestes*, Brook's troupe discovered that the plasticity of language increased with its foreignness, and that distance paradoxically enabled the actor to embody it more intimately. Hughes' translation of Seneca, then, in conjunction with Brook's direction, was an attempt to facilitate this physical connection using spoken English. Hughes discards Seneca's rhetorical form, the external restraints provided by syntactic balance. Instead, his verbal patterns obey the equally insistent but more organic authority of the speaking body. In one sense, it seems, Hughes has let Seneca loose from the metrical cage, but this deliverance re-embeds the words in the performer's flesh, using his own muscularity and breath as the constraints on Oedipus' discourse.

Brook, despite subscribing to the currently orthodox line that Seneca wrote for declamation rather than stage, regarded this as an invitation to aesthetic radicalism, since the play therefore came to him uncoupled from preconceptions of naturalism. Brook recognized that Seneca's characters were not 'personalities' but embodied forces of nature, silhouettes, shapes cut out of language. He cultivated stillness in his actors at the same time as they filled the auditorium with violent sonic activity: groans, screams, yelps and chanting came from the chorus, scattered among the audience, while the dialogue was delivered at breakneck speed, leaving no room for reflection or for processing one horror before the next was piled on top. Colin Blakely (Creon) recalls audience members finding the pressure too much, and growing

[48] Smith (1972).
[49] Brook, personal correspondence quoted in Smith (1972), 45.

physically ill.[50] Gesture, when it occurred, remained stylized. Manto went into epileptic spasms as she described the bull's entrails, Creon spun like a dervish during his account of summoning Laius, and Jocasta represented her suicide by symbolic impalement on a conical spike. According to Williams, 'Savage, ominous stasis and ceremony were offset by the use of complex choral material,' Brook's team devising modes of delivery that treated Hughes' text 'as a musical score or libretto, to warp and extend the words beyond the merely referential.'[51] Despite their physical immobility, Brook demanded that his actors remain 'invisibly activated: the still exterior must cover an extraordinary inner dynamism' channeled into the voice.[52] In order to accomplish this, he held rehearsals in which the cast explored 'obscenity',[53] playing out the extremes which could then be internally reactivated to inform vocal delivery during performance. Critics, however, were less than enthusiastic about this experimental conversion of second-rate classic into heavy-handed ritual, finding the production laden with 'gimmicks' while failing to elucidate the text.[54] The impression of avant-garde self-indulgence was compounded by Brook's notorious finale, a misplaced gesture towards Dionysiac release which involved the cast parading around a colossal yellow phallus to the tune of "Yes, We Have No Bananas".

Reconstituting theatre as ritual - a transformative experience for the audience that would redeem them from the alienation and superficiality of a modern consumer lifestyle - became the Holy Grail of avant-garde theatre during the 1960s and 1970s.[55] Seneca was by no means the only ancient author to receive this treatment,[56] but it is striking that a playwright still regarded by the academic community as cumbersome, mannered and

[50] Blakely interviewed by Croyden (1969).
[51] Williams (1988), 116.
[52] Brook (1987), 64.
[53] Blakely interviewed by Croyden (1969).
[54] Marowitz (1968), 124.
[55] Schechner (1988); Innes (1993).
[56] Richard Schechner, whose *Dionysus in 69* has been recognised as a turning point in the reception of Greek tragedy, also staged Hughes' *Oedipus* is 1978.

unperformable should have been assimilated into the quest for psychotropic theatrical transcendence. Seneca may have retained unwelcome associations of sententious *romanitas* and imperial pomp, but meanwhile the senecan combination of secular (or perhaps "pagan") mysticism and visceral corporeality was returning to the stage, repackaged this time as counter-culture.

Academic perspectives on Senecan performance

At the same time as Seneca appealed to revolutions occurring in theatrical practice, receptions of Seneca within the academy began to quicken and multiply. Stephen Harrison identifies 1966 as 'a key year for Senecan tragedy and its rehabilitation,'[57] but does not emphasise the irony that Zwierlein's repudiation of the plays' performability was issued just before their biggest revival on the professional stage. With Zwierlein's study, existing trends in Senecan scholarship reached something of a crisis. In the 1920s, Léon Herrmann had contended that the plays were meant for stage performance, and Margarete Bieber later supported this contention with allegedly conclusive material evidence.[58] In 1966, however, Zwierlein argued with equal conviction that the plays' dramaturgical defects precluded anything more animated than a rehearsed reading.[59] Approaches such as Zwierlein's are evidently based on conceptions of stagecraft outmoded even at the time, and on the inappropriate application of neoclassical principles. Nevertheless, the spectre of non-performance continues to cast a not inconsiderable shadow over the current perception of Seneca's work.[60] Kragelund notes that 'assumptions about modes of performance have had a

[57] Harrison (2009), 151.
[58] Herrmann (1924); Bieber (1953).
[59] Zwierlein (1966).
[60] Fantham (1982), Coffey & Mayer (1990), Mayer (2002), Goldberg (2000) and Fantham (2000). Worryingly, these negative opinions have gained a foothold in disciplines other than Classics: Hunter, in the *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (1986), 127 denies that Shakespeare could have had any contact with 'the closet drama of Seneca, whose frozen horrors are designed for static declamation and can have offered little or nothing to professional actors.' Littlewood (2004) is still 'remaining agnostic on the staging question'; Keulen

distorting impact on modes of reading and interpreting [this] corpus of texts,'[61] but he attempts to counteract this impact by revisiting some of Seneca's contentious scenes, rather than tackling what I see as the root of the problem and examining the rhetoric in which objections to staging have typically been embedded. The disjunction between the anti-performance discourse and the senecanism beginning to surface in contemporary theatre during the late 1960s is readily apparent. Pursuing this line of argument may seem like chasing a phantom quarry – few Senecan scholars, after all, would today categorically deny some form of performance in antiquity – but the debate has played a major part in determining attitudes to Seneca in the wider academic community, even affecting the parameters within which classical performance reception has so far been conducted. It is therefore important to review the development of and participation in the performance controversy, however inflated its proportions, and to concentrate our attention on this formative period during the 1960s when the various aspects crystallized.

Immediate reactions to *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* were less than favourable. Irritated by Zwierlein's pedantic objection to continuity errors and unmotivated silences, one reviewer derided his thesis as based on a 'wildly inept' proposition which 'might lead one to suppose that Z. had never seen a play at all.'[62] Although Zwierlein's conclusions seem unnecessarily conservative, Walker's criticism seems nevertheless unnecessarily harsh. Zwierlein's observations regarding Seneca's dramaturgical technique are for the most part accurate, sympathetic and textually thorough. His appreciation of the dramatist presents no impediment; the argument only parts company with the data when a narrow definition of

(2001) and Hine (2000) likewise equivocate, taking their cue from Tarrant (1985). Meanwhile Fitch's current Loeb edition (2002), 21 follows Calder (1976) in conceding that 'excerpts or full texts of Seneca's plays were performed in private mansions, and even in the imperial palace'; his 1987 edition of *HF* avoids any mention of staging whatsoever. The latest Oxford World's Classics translation (Wilson, 2010) still informs its readers that 'The performance of Seneca's plays is a vexed question.' Davis (2003) and Boyle (1997), (2011) remain the strongest advocates for full performance.

[61] Kragelund (2008) [first published 1999 in *Classica et Mediaevalia*].

[62] Walker (1969), 185-86.

drama is driven like a wedge between the content of the plays and their potential for performance. Theatre in West Berlin, where Zwierlein was based at the time, had just begun to enter its famous phase of experimentalism and revolt – Weiss' *Marat/Sade* premiered in 1964, Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* and Handke's *Offending the Audience* in 1965 – but this was not yet the dominant mode. Immediately after the war, with most existing theatre buildings damaged or destroyed, enterprising companies mounted *Kellertheater* or *Zimmertheater* in intimate found-spaces, often single rooms so small that 'these semi-professional groups could only give dramatized readings, so the public came to "hear" rather than "see" a play.'[63] When producers returned to the main stage during the 1950s, their primary goal was not experimentation but re-establishment, and participation in the *Bewältigung der Vergangenheit*, "coming to terms" with the trauma of recent history:[64] hard-hitting political drama and satire, documentary plays, and *Volksstücke* – gritty domestic realism – sprang up alongside an extensive imported repertoire and generous helpings of Shakespeare, Schiller and Molière.[65] In between Bertolt Brecht and Peter Stein, then, falls this relatively conservative post-war period which prioritised stabilization over iconoclasm. Zwierlein's adherence to stage naturalism may result in part from this background. Seneca's own reputation in post-war Germany may also have contributed: when Theodore Ziolkowski extols 'the appeal of Seneca for Christian humanists seeking to rebuild Germany in the wake of World War II,'[66] it is as philosopher and moralist, not as tragic playwright, that he gained pre-eminence. Re-branding the preposterous bull sacrifice at *Oed*. 293-383 as evocative poetry, rather than bad drama, enables the sage who gave the world the *Epistulae Morales* to retain his dignity.

[63] Hortmann (2008), 288.
[64] Patterson (1976), 35-36. Barnett (2008), 305 comments that 'the 1950s had a "business as usual" flavour… with little room for innovation.'
[65] On repertoire generally, see Patterson (1976), Barnett (2008), Hortmann (2008), Rischbeiter et. al. (1967); on imported plays, see Rischbeiter (1967), 51-64; for a useful table listing productions by playwright, see Patterson (1976), 114-15.
[66] Ziolkowski (2004), 57.

Because this is not the place to assess the actual merits of Zwierlein's position on the ancient source material, but rather to identify the assumptions underpinning it and the verbal idiosyncrasies that expose them, I will resist taking issue with his opening attack on Act 5 of *Phaedra* and move instead straight to the core of the problem, Zwierlein's default expectation of naturalism. A play, to his mind, cannot consist of a series of disjointed *Prunkstücken* (showpieces) but must comprise a *lebendigen Handlungsablauf* (a lifelike plotline).[67] In trying to explain why disjunction presents a problem to spectators but not to auditors, Zwierlein runs with apparent naivety into the same theoretical thicket as Horace, Corneille and Lessing: what, in fact, is the experiential difference between seeing and hearing? Why should the eyes need flattering with unbroken illusion while the ears can accept the most fantastic impossibilities? Zwierlein avoids putting any pressure on this point, simply asserting it as a self-evident aesthetic truth.[68]

The characteristics he discerns in Senecan drama are indubitably part of its fabric. One of his most pertinent observations concerns the tendency of Senecan characters to melt away without a trace when they have finished speaking, until a stray line reveals they have been lurking onstage for hundreds of lines in improbable silence.[69] Zwierlein attributes this to the relaxed approach to stagecraft permitted by recitation: when a character stops talking, the auditors simply forget she exists, and involve themselves instead in the content of the next *Prunkerzählung* (showy narration). These transitions are described, however, in strikingly pictorial terms. Characters fade in and out of visibility, creating a chiaroscuro effect as they come into brilliant focus and then 'sink back into the dark' (*im Dunkel versinken*). When their part is played, each figure 'falls back into the impenetrable darkness from which they first

[67] Zwierlein (1966), 126.
[68] Zwierlein (1966), 20-21, 40-42, 53-57, 66, 84-87, 122-23.
[69] Zwierlein (1966), 45-67, esp. 52-53; the main examples he discusses are Megara (*HF* 500-1015) and Clytemnestra (*Ag*. 588-953; Tarrant and other editors suggest that she exits the stage here). He makes a similar point at 45-46 and 57-60 regarding mime or dumbshow such as that which appears to be required of the silent Polyxena (*Tro*. 861-1008).

emerged'.[70] Unnoticed by Zwierlein himself, this cyclicity corresponds poignantly to Seneca's own chorus (*Troades* 371-408) in which the dead sink back into the formlessness they occupied preceding birth, *quo non nata iacent*. Zwierlein's susceptibility to pictorialism likewise comes out in his repeated references to Seneca's rhetorical show-stoppers as images (*Bilder*). Unfortunately, these self-contained *Einzelbilder* are incompatible with the primary demands of drama: a coherent plot (*Handlung*) and dramatic plausibility (*dramatischen Wahrheit*).[71] Nevertheless, Zwierlein struggles to convey their effect via anything other than the vocabulary of vision. Only his insistence that a play must display internal consistency prevents him from making the logical leap that would convert Seneca's tableaux into an implicit template for staging rather than an implicit directive against it.

*In einer ohne Unterbrechung fortlaufenden Bühnenhandlung wäre es unverstellbar*, he insists, with perfect correctness:[72] the slips in location, the disappearing characters, the long unheard asides and the discrepancies in continuity certainly would be inconceivable in a regular dramatic plot with no interruptions, but Zwierlein's error lies in his assumption that all tragic theatre must conform to this model. Seneca 'destroys the spectator's illusion that he is experiencing a realistic (*wirklichkeitsnähe*) course of events,' patching together sensational episodes at the expense of a 'lifelike' (*lebensvoll / lebenhaftig / lebendig*) theatrical performance.[73] Once again, there is nothing inaccurate in this description of Seneca's technique, only in the premise that visual verisimilitude is indispensable to theatre. The imagination of auditors, Zwierlein contends, knows no restrictions, but if a spectator notices any details out of place in the *Bühnenbild*, the stage-picture, he can no longer sustain his belief in the illusion. Tragedy, in other words, only works if staged according to the principles of stage naturalism. Zwierlein frames his sight/sound opposition in terms of

[70] Zwierlein (1966), 54-56.
[71] Zwierlein (1966), 90; 93; 110;118.
[72] ['In a continuous plot without interruptions, this would be unthinkable.'] Zwierlein (1966), 92.
[73] Zwierlein (1966). *lebensvoll*: 32; *lebenhaftig*: 84; *lebendig*: 46, 73, 119, 126; also *lebensnähes*, 45.

freedom and restraint: '[An auditor's] fancy is not held back by the fetters of his eyes,' he explains, with a trace of wistfulness (*Seine Phantasie ist nicht durch die Fessel des Auges gehemmt*). If it were only possible to escape these 'fetters of the eyes' – the fetters of a naturalistic aesthetic – it might also be possible to enjoy Seneca's *prunkvolle Einzelbilder*, his fabulous tableaux, his carelessly sutured set-pieces and sudden eruptions from the dark as fantasies played out on the living stage as well as in the mind.

Not all twentieth-century readers felt so inhibited. In 1924, Léon Herrmann – whose translations most probably brought Seneca to the attention of Artaud - published a spirited defence of Seneca's performability. Herrmann primarily sets out to demolish the rather snobbish argument put forward by Boissier in 1861, that the plays lack the vitality to attract a *vulgaire* public and would only appeal to a select coterie.[74] Herrmann proposes a contrary model based on the Elizabethan playhouse in which the literati could appreciate poetic subtleties while the groundlings were diverted by the associated spectacle. Alternatively, the imperial court provided a space for private representation (as during the Grand Siècle, or at Blackfriars).[75] Herrmann's position is the strongest possible: he states 'that all the tragedies of Seneca, without exception, were intended by him for presentation in a theatre, be that public or private, complete with actors, choruses and music.'[76] Like Zwierlein, however, Herrmann does himself the disservice of assuming all stage performance to be bound by its iron-clad contract with *vraisemblance*. Changes of setting require changes of décor, interior scenes require curtains or opening doors, and special effects such as *Thyestes*' eclipse or the trembling altar in *Oedipus* must have been so difficult to achieve in broad daylight that their accomplishment would have appeared technically astonishing, if not downright magical. The

[74] Boissier (1861), 438. 448-49. Beare (1945), 15-16 goes a step further and suggests that coterie audiences were probably paid to attend in cash or other inducements.
[75] Herrmann (1924), 156-58.
[76] Herrmann (1924), 195: *La théorie que nous adoptons est que toutes les tragédies de Sénèque, sans exception, étaient destinées par lui à la présentation sur un théâtre publique ou privé de ces oeuvres, avec acteurs, choeurs et musique*.

full tragic rig worn by the actors, in Herrmann's imagined productions, would have restricted their gestural vocabulary and thus elevated their interactions into confrontations between archetypes.[77]

Overall, Herrmann regards Senecan tragedy as a hybrid medium, integrating music, dance, declamation, pantomime and grand procession, perfectly in keeping with the extravagance of their language.[78] In 1939, Moses Hadas (developing Regenbogen's 1928 work on Seneca's poetics of suffering) had argued that Seneca's hyperbole and pleonasm expressed nothing other than an 'excess of intensity' corresponding to the metaphysical outlook that arose from a set of historical conditions. He saw no reason why these long impassioned cries of horror could not be staged, pointing out that 'the normal idiom of Silver Latin poetry is exaggeration.'[79] Michael Coffey, in his annotated bibliographical survey of 1957, trivialised this aspect of Hadas' argument, and elsewhere vilified Herrmann, labelling his methods 'treacherous' and his arguments 'unsatisfactory'.[80] Coffey's own denial of Senecan performance appears to have coloured his attitude throughout the survey.

In 1963, Henry and Walker observed, 'If Seneca's plays are examined in the traditional terms of dramatic criticism, they can hardly be accepted as plays at all.'[81] These 'traditional terms' are readily apparent in contemporary approaches to theatre history, such as Bentley's *The Life of the Drama* (1965). Bentley asserts that 'Art works with the surface of life,' and in drama this involves the depiction of 'human beings walking and standing and sitting and talking.'[82] Although allegedly encompassing everything from Aeschylus to Racine to Beckett, this definition of drama shrinks still further, reducing the representational diversity of these playwrights to a single *modus operandi* in which 'perhaps against a

[77] Herrmann (1924), 199-208; 213-14; 220.
[78] Herrmann (1924), 226. Compare the similar point made by Bieber(1953), 104. *Es gibt keinen besseren Rahmen für Aufführungen von Senecas Tragödien als die scaenae frontes*.
[79] Hadas (1939), 221-24
[80] Coffey (1957), 116.
[81] Henry & Walker (1963), 3.
[82] Bentley (1965), 61.

pictorial background, we see people encountering each other.'[83] If such encounters are exaggerated – by means of declamatory monologue, extreme situations, and hyperbolic language accompanied by grandiose gestures, designed to stimulate the emotions rather than the intellect - they fall into Bentley's category of 'Melodrama'. Melodrama, according to Bentley, appeals to 'the most crass of immature fantasies'; it is 'savage and infantile',[84] a blunt and unsophisticated instrument flattering the psyche with its most unreconstructed desires: utter surrender, utter omnipotence, utter disintegration, or utter retribution. This is perhaps what Norman T. Pratt, for example, has in mind when he refers repeatedly not to Senecan *tragedy*, but to Senecan 'melodrama'.[85] Despite the concurrent experimental turn away from theatre that replicated interpersonal interactions, mainstream scholarship still clung to the ideal of naturalism.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the period's only Anglophone monograph on Seneca, its conclusions remaining uncontested after two decades: Mendell's *Our Seneca* (first published in 1941).[86] Mendell finds incomprehensible Seneca's disregard for something he calls 'the dramatic illusion',[87] and concludes in the manner of Zwierlein that *Rezitationsdrame* is the only possible solution: 'The failure to motivate entrances and exits or properly to introduce characters is quite sufficient evidence that the play was never intended for acting.'[88] Faced with material that does not behave 'properly', Mendell and other scholars prefer to attribute this to Senecan "failure" rather than the inadequacy of the critical standards applied. Seneca resorted to epigram, rant and 'hocus-pocus' (Medea's spell, for example) because he and his decadent audience 'could not appreciate the dialogue which, to our taste,

[83] Bentley (1965), 64.
[84] Bentley (1965), 217; 255
[85] Pratt (1963) and (1965).
[86] Coffey (1957), 116 disparages the work, but notes that no alternative was available.
[87] Mendell (1941), 90.
[88] Mendell (1941), 88.

is the chief substance of a drama.'[89] Introduced to mid-century readers by detractors like Mendell, it is therefore unsurprising that Seneca had difficulty being taken seriously as a tragedian. Beare, in *The Roman Stage* (1965) did not help matters much by relegating Seneca to a brief epilogue on the grounds that he committed unstageable absurdities such as Clytemnestra speaking her thoughts aloud unheard by the Nurse (*Ag*. 108-30; Beare, it seems, is forgetting about Euripides' *Hecuba*, 736-51). Similarly, Beare finds positively risible the idea of Hercules bringing on a Cerberus, as 'dogs are difficult to manage on the stage, and three-headed dogs not easily obtainable.'[90] Once again, foreign standards of dramatic naturalism are used as armour against the threatening idiosyncrasies of Senecan material. Duff, in the 1960 edition of *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age*, likewise states the case unequivocally: 'That Seneca intended his dramas for the stage is incredible.'[91] He has no actual rebuttal for Herrmann, however, merely citing Coffey's dismissal of *Le Théâtre de Sénèque* and resorting to the usual bluster about pedantry and bombast. 'The reader is not captured, as he should be, by the dramatic illusion,' Duff complains, betraying both his prescriptiveness and his adherence to inappropriate criteria.[92]

It should be evident how thoroughly classicists opposing performance were committed to the assumed conventions of naturalistic drama. Such assumptions have proved hard to eradicate,[93] and it is therefore important to be aware of precisely where and how they originated. Even the supposedly disinterested Coffey cannot resist registering his approval of a recent dissertation opposing performance, concurring that unmotivated entrances undermine the play's 'dramatic unity'.[94] Motto and Clark, conducting a similar survey in 1973, perceive

[89] Mendell (1941), 121.
[90] Beare (1965), 234-35, 352.
[91] Duff (1960), 201.
[92] Duff (1960), 207-10.
[93] See above, note 4.
[94] Coffey (1957), 130.

a 'general tide which deplores Senecan drama.'[95] It is a curious phenomenon that most scholars arguing against the plays' performance combine it with derogatory comments directed at their style; only Mastronarde in 1970 finally exhibits appreciation as well as scepticism. While contending that 'the art of Seneca's *Oedipus* is not stage-art,'[96] Mastronarde nevertheless demonstrates the coherence and intricacy of the poetic craftsmanship involved in its intratextual dialectics, or what he terms, after Eliot, the 'drama in the word'.

In taking this approach to Seneca, Mastronarde was following a number of articles which had appeared during the preceding decade in the recuperative tradition of Regenbogen and Herrmann.[97] The most significant contribution was undoubtedly Herington's 1966 'Senecan Tragedy',[98] which performed the first analysis of Senecan style and form on its own terms, extrapolating a theory of tragedy from the given text rather than imposing preconceptions:

> Greek tragedy can be read (and, I would say, should be read in the first instance) as representations of people in action, whatever ulterior symbolisms and abstract truths may be discerned through that action. Senecan narratives, on the other hand, cannot be so read, because they are representations of passion in people and things. The symbolic and the abstract have entered into the fabric of the drama.[99]

[95] Motto & Clark (1973), 220.
[96] Mastronarde (1970), 314.
[97] These included the series by Henry and Walker (1963, 1965, 1966, 1967), Gordon Braden's instructive comparison of megalomania to Caesarian absolutism (1970), reassessments of character portrayal by Charles Garton (1959) and R.W. Tobin (1966), and Poe's insightful reading of *Thyestes* (1969). However questionable his conclusions about the morality of Seneca's Stoic universe, N.T. Pratt (1963) also showed interest in patterns of imagery similar to Mastronarde's (1963), as did W.H. Owen (1968).
[98] Motto & Clark (1973), 233 comment that 'to date, the best general study of Senecan drama has been provided by C.J. Herington.'
[99] Herington (1966), 456.

Motto and Clark, in their survey of the contemporary scholarly landscape, commend Herington's approach, taking the formalist position that 'It is high time that the Senecan plays be looked at for what they are – *in themselves*.'[100] The approaches rejected as superfluous include comparison with Greek precursors, comparison with Jacobethan derivations,[101] and – rather oddly – attempts to reconstruct the plays within their Roman context, including any contribution to the performance debate.

Before these recommendations took effect, however, there are hints that an alternative branch of Senecan scholarship might have started to emerge. In the 1968 volume of *Arion*, along with a review of Brook's *Oedipus* and another – by Herington – of Watling's 1966 Penguin translation, a 'Senecan Triptych' was published, comprising two contrasting translations of *Thyestes*' banquet scene followed by an interview with (proposed) director Rod Whitaker and (proposed) screenwriter James Hynd.[102] Inspired by Herington's article, staff and students at the University of Austin, Texas had collaborated on a sound recording of the *Thyestes*, whereupon 'someone suggested making a film.'[103] There are pronounced convergences between Hynd and Whitaker's conception of the play's cinematic potential and those of European theatre-makers working in the Artaudian mode. Whitaker, like Brook, compares Seneca's performance aesthetic to Japanese Kabuki; like Ted Hughes, Hynd sees the need to give the text a 'ritual shape'.[104] The creative team considered using puppets in place of live actors. Hynd compares Seneca's trademark cascading imagery to 'psychedelic films in which the element of naturalism [is] almost completely lacking,' and which

[100] Motto & Clark (1973), 230. Emphasis original.
[101] The main vogue for this occurred somewhat earlier in the century with Cunliffe (1912) and (1925), Eliot (1927a) and (1927b), Lucas (1922), Boas (1923), and Johnson (1948). It was continued in the 1960s by Pratt (1965), Evans (1965), and Rees (1969). Cunliffe was reprinted in 1965, as was Eliot in 1966. Meanwhile Hunter (1967) argues Seneca is overrated as a Shakespearean source.
[102] The film version of *Thyestes* they were planning seems never to have eventuated, perhaps due to the funding trouble mentioned in the introduction to the interview.
[103] Hynd & Whitaker (1968), 21.
[104] Compare Brook (1968b), 51 and Hughes (1969), 7; also Hughes in conversation with Correy & Ravilich (1982).

concentrate instead on 'the intense development of mood.'[105] Finally, Whitaker comments on Seneca's 'genius for sound – why not take advantage of it? Use it like music?'[106] Like Lavelli and Brook, and no doubt influenced by Herington's remarks on Seneca's operatic or symphonic texture, Hynd and Whitaker realised that Seneca afforded richer interpretive possibilities if considered as a score rather than as a script. Their interdisciplinary academic collaboration shows considerable affinities with the revolution in dramatic form currently rehabilitating Seneca as food for the avant-garde. It was even casually noted in a prominent article on characterisation in *Medea* that 'Seneca's reputation as first parent of… Theatre of Cruelty is so secure that it seems needless for a critic at this date [1967] to spend trouble confirming the parentage.'[107] Herington himself concludes his frosty review of Watling by declaring that Seneca's proper place was on the living stage, and that this stage was not the polite pedestrian proscenium envisaged by Penguin Classics, but rather 'the stage of Artaud and *Marat/Sade*.'[108] Theatre practice was leaving its mark on the academic reception of Seneca, but despite the dawning prospect of a new respect for senecanism, after the *annus mirabilis* of 1968 it was (somewhat anomalously) Greek tragedy which came to dominate the theatrical marketplace; and, as a result, which came to determine the agenda of Classical Reception Studies.

In 2004, Edith Hall defined the emerging field of classical performance reception as 'the post-Renaissance history of *theatrical* performances of Greek and Roman *drama*.'[109] This emphasis (original) lays down clear parameters for the art form and for the conditions of its reception, but allows the content to remain muddled: Greek-and-Roman, easily abbreviated to Graeco-Roman, easily then amalgamated into an undifferentiated term, or separated into substance and shadow. Greek drama has manifold advantages: a wealth of data

[105] Hynd & Whitaker (1968), 61.
[106] Hynd & Whitaker (1968), 63.
[107] Henry & Walker (1967), 169.
[108] Herington (1968), 490.
[109] Hall (2004a), 53.

pertaining to staging in antiquity,[110] a substantial history of critical approbation, a long-standing association with political liberalism, and a recent (post-1960s) surge of popularity in the commercial theatre. Seneca, on the other hand, has suffered from an inversion of these same circumstances: slim pickings for ancient performance conditions and residual animosity towards performativity, coupled with an old-fashioned density that makes it an unwieldy instrument for adaptors needing flexible, whip-crack texts with which to strike out at topical issues.

## Conclusion

Like Artaud's *Cenci*, then, Seneca's momentary comeback in the 1960s was another counterfactual proposition, an offer that might have been taken up but was dropped as the performing arts shifted their attention away from verse drama and towards the post-dramatic, a shift which could accommodate the Greeks but found the senecan aesthetic less amenable. Barrault, Lavelli and Brook each realised the need to handle senecan text like music, a property also noted by Herington and by the film team at Austin, but this insight did not permeate any further into the ongoing performance debate. As a close reading of Zwierlein makes clear, *die Fessel des Auges* still curtailed the potential of senecan theatricality in the lecture room as much as on the stage.

The conclusion suggested by the 2004 collection of essays *Dionysus Since 69* is that the "Return to the Greeks" has been an essentially political phenomenon. Class, race and gender struggles rediscovered in these canonical texts a means of articulating opposition to the mainstream.[111] The simultaneous "Peformative Turn" could have gone either way – Brook directed Seneca's *Oedipus* in the 'watershed' year 1968-69, and Schechner himself

[110] Representative examples of approaches to ancient staging include Taplin (1978) on reconstructive stagecraft; Wiles (1997) on the use of space; the essays collected in Winkler & Zeitlin (1990) regarding political context; Rehm (2002) on spatial poetics.
[111] These appropriations are addressed in *Dionysus Since 69* by Hall, Hardwick and Foley, respectively.

staged the same (Ted Hughes') translation ten years later – but as argued in the first half of this chapter, the rejection of the spoken word so fundamental to this movement cleaved it away from senecanism. Seneca proved an uncongenial companion on the 'quest for authenticity' pursued by performing artists in the 1960s and 70s.[112] The human body in its splendid, terrible nakedness, not as a fragile bundle of impressions perpetually tussling with language, became the symbol of the performative revolution.

[112] Wiles (2004), 254.

## CONCLUSION

Like other ancient playwrights, Seneca has certainly been produced more frequently than ever over the last few decades, notably entering (among other adaptations) Jean Anouilh's *Medée* (first performed in 1953), Andrei Serban's *Medea* (1972), Tony Harrison's *Phaedra Britannica* (1975), Steven Berkoff's *Greek* (1980), Heiner Müller's *Medeamaterial / Landschaft mit Argonauten* (1983), Caryl Churchill's *Thyestes* (1994), and Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996). This should not lead, however, to the conclusion that we are re-entering a Senecan – or senecan – phase in theatrical practice. Compared to the floodtide of Greek tragedy, Seneca's appearances remain a moderate trickle. There are many interrelated reasons for this: verse drama, for example, has become associated with tradition and authority, a suffocating weight that must be shaken off by the atextual avant-garde; in the mainstream, meanwhile, visual culture predominates. The distinctive formal features which made Seneca such a tractable model for early modern playwrights have now become an impediment to the kind of radical appropriation presently favoured for classical works. Once the essential component of the senecan aesthetic – its operation through intensive figured speech – is removed, it becomes difficult to identify an adaptation as senecan, whatever its declarations of affinity.[1] Nevertheless, it is precisely this relative muting of Seneca that has provided an opportune moment to reflect on the Senecan tradition in light of its *longue durée*, providing a new way of understanding not only the plays' performative *Nachleben* but also how this has intersected with critical and scholarly receptions.

This thesis has traced the performance history of Senecan tragedy, and in doing so uncovered the persistence of a mode of experiencing theatre which I have termed the senecan aesthetic. Rather than displaying lifelike scenes before an audience, senecan theatre is primarily aural, and indeed quasi-musical, employing verbal overload, especially figures of

[1] Kane's *Phaedra's Love*, for example, draws on Seneca without being senecan.

excess, to stimulate psychophysical reactions. Seneca's obsession with the monstrous and with replicating the mechanisms of autocracy has simultaneously exercised a powerful fascination for theatre-makers. Unlike deliberate allusion, however, this form of reception involves often unconscious participation in a rhizomatic (decentralised) web of trans-historical interconnections.[2] In order to show how Seneca's reception corresponds to the changing fortunes of the senecan aesthetic, I will review the narrative so far proposed.

First-century Rome offered three attested ways of staging tragic text: as *tragoedia cantata*, as *tragoedia saltata*, and as *recitatio*. As the environment in which Seneca's plays coalesced, it inevitably informed their dramaturgy, their formal features, and their treatment of power dynamics. I have argued that the medium of pantomime creates a disjunctive relationship between the speaking voice and the spoken body; similarly, *recitatio* adopts the premise that the bodies of auditors fall willingly under the sway of a powerful voice. This separation of vocal from physical performance was retained and enhanced by the Renaissance humanist scholars who took Seneca as their stylistic blueprint for neo-Latin tragedy. The student's body, like the orator's, exhibited not the finer points of a character but the movements necessary for an effective delivery of the text. While this might include the stylised signs of age, gender, rank, or humour,[3] its goal was not individuation, but suborning the audience and training the performer using the rhythms and intonations of what Prynne termed 'flexanimous' speech. At this point, the senecan aesthetic was practically inseparable from Seneca. With the first vernacular tragedies, however, came the transposition of senecan features into otherwise unrelated plots, reinforced by repetition and progressively independent: the ghost, the *satelles*, the verbal rendition of pain, the call for cataclysm and the mad vision of Megaera fall into this category, but the most pervasive retention is above all the sense that theatre was aural. Playhouses were built for soundwaves, not sightlines.

[2] Hardwick (2011), 39-44 outlines this approach.
[3] Burns (1990), 41-43.

Soliloquy continued to develop as a representational medium even after 'tufty Tamburlaine' became an object of satire and the permanent *jeu de paume* rendered Garnier's thunderous, attention-grabbing *tirades* obsolete.

At this point, theory caught up with practice, and Seneca was subjected to the scrutiny of neoclassical Aristotelianism. The concept of *unité de lieu* had a particularly marked effect, as it completely altered the relationship between an actor's voice and his surroundings. Instead of being able to change location at will, creating a constantly shifting scenescape purely through words, he or she had to work within the fixity of a designated setting. Although in many respects initiating a productive tension, this scenographic development also contributed to eroding the senecan aesthetic, imposing in its place a new focus on the actor's body as a figure in a static frame. During the English Restoration, Seneca's influence on the work of popular tragedian Nathaniel Lee coincided with an interest in the poetics of horror, particularly during the Exclusion Crisis. At the same time, the invention of the inner scene enabled graphic visual representations to accompany and often overwhelm their verbal counterparts, while the presence of actresses encouraged the perception of an isomorphic relationship between the performer's body and the body of the character represented. Rhetoric remained in the repertoire, but over the course of the eighteenth century would be superseded by pictorialism and a burgeoning inquiry into how acting might appear more "Natural".[4] With few exceptions, Seneca ceased to provide congenial material for adaptation. I have argued that this turn away from hypertragedy may be attributed not only to a distaste for violent content but to the incompatibility of senecan expressionism with the dependence of sympathy on self-containment. It also resulted from the double wave of philhellenism, the 'sedate grandeur' of Winckelmann's statue-gallery and the idealist *Schönheit* under

[4] Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1769); comment by e.g. Roach (1985).

construction at Weimar. These factors generated A.W. Schlegel's attack on senecanism with Seneca as its scapegoat, a defamation which rapidly became academic orthodoxy.

The Romantic movement, as a recent volume of essays has shown,[5] turned to Rome as well as classical Greece for inspiration. Combining this impulse with an equally Romantic penchant for the gothic, Shelley's *Cenci* is an exceptional work in that it anticipated not closet perusal but stage performance, recognising the theatrical potential of lyric drama and reaching back to Seneca to do so. In particular, *The Cenci* explores the ability of non-literal (metaphorical) discourse to apprehend unspeakable experiences. Its most significant production, however, mounted by Artaud in 1935, rejected this crucial element due to a conviction that articulate speech had no place in authentic, somatically-invested theatre. This misconception was challenged by the next generation of directors, who returned to Senecan plays using Artaudian techniques as their interpretive touchstone. Nevertheless, between the psychological naturalism of the small screen and the deconstructionist anarchy of performance art, the fugue-like formality of senecanism failed to take hold. Senecan bodies are neither members of civil society nor escapees from the prison-house of signification. They are creatures at the mercy of language, driven and torn, *unförmliche Marionetten* twisting on lyrical strings.

Seneca has an uncomfortably authoritarian tone. Greek tragedy contains ample opportunities to reinterpret its referents and recast its objectives.[6] Its speech registers are on the whole public, and its debates multifaceted, lending it to dialogic engagement. Romantic Hellenism first associated the form with radical politics, and subversion has become the

[5] Saunders et al. (2012).
[6] Hall & Macintosh (2005), xxii concur with Vidal-Naquet (1990), 117-39 in locating 'Greek tragedy's power to transcend history precisely in its susceptibility to radically different interpretations.' According to Vidal-Naquet, it is the inherent polysemy of tragic discourse which ensures 'the drama remains open to a number of different interpretations.'

defining feature of twentieth-century appropriations.[7] Senecan tragedy, on the other hand, admits no argument. It deals in absolutes: absolute power, irresistible forces, inexorable outcomes. One way or another, it demands submission, mirroring Seneca's own Stoic formulation of destiny, which can either be voluntarily embraced or will sweep the helpless individual along regardless (*ducunt volentem Fata, nolentem trahunt*, *Ep.* 107.11). Personal will counts for very little, in Seneca's theatrical universe, where language is not used to assert independent subjectivity but to assimilate private, incommunicable experience into figurative, universal metaphors.[8] Braden relates the pathological solipsism of Senecan characters to the absolutist state in which the tragedies were originally conceived.[9] In reproducing the paralysis and suffocation, and the distortions of perspective suffered within an autocratic regime, the plays do not necessarily condone it; but at the same time, they function as expressions of a traumatised condition, not templates for any practical resistance. This may explain their intractability for late twentieth-century artists seeking theatrical discourses of protest. Similarly, while Hellenism still affords scholars an armchair allegiance with the liberal and the radical – as Hall points out, 'avant-garde classicists have tended to go to Greek tragedy' - senecanism has no such loopholes.[10] Ironically, then, the Greeks now occupy the mainstream of classical performance reception, with Seneca's tyranny relegated to a secondary narrative.

It is traditional to close a rehabilitative argument with an upbeat remark about how relevant the subject matter has suddenly become, how there are now more Senecan productions than ever before, how the enlightened twenty-first century has provided us with a happy ending by embracing abstruse Roman verse-drama. I cannot do this with any degree of

[7] See for instance Carter (2007), 155-58- on *Trojan Women* and anti-war protest; on Medea as feminist icon, McDonald (1997) and Hall & Macintosh (2005); on post-colonial adaptations, Hardwick & Gillespie (2007) and Wetmore (2002).
[8] Johnson (1987) argues that metaphors derived from shared bodily experience ('embodied schemata') form the basis of linguistic communication.
[9] Braden (1970), *passim*.
[10] Hall (2004b), 39.

integrity. Although Seneca has certainly benefited from the post-1960s enthusiasm for ancient drama, revivals of these plays have experienced nothing like the surge in popularity and controversy afforded their Greek counterparts. In place of the assurance given by Seneca's recent *World's Classics* editor that 'an unjustly neglected and important oeuvre is beginning to get its due,'[11] I propose that Seneca's recent performance history is predicated on the counterfactual, the might-have-been: if Artaud's *Cenci* had not failed, if Roger Blin's *Thyeste* had not been curtailed by the '68 riots, Seneca might have attained a more respectable profile in the avant-garde scene. As it is, verse drama remains exceptional among new writing for the stage, even among translations. We inhabit an increasingly visual, rather than an aural culture, which renders this most vital aspect of the senecan aesthetic more and more alien. Moreover, I am inclined to see Wilson's observation that 'it is striking how many of Seneca's central themes seem particularly urgent and relevant in the current political and social climate,' as not only a rather banal, but also a rather ghoulish piece of wishful thinking.[12] We do not, in fact, suffer at present the full-blown political and metaphysical dread saturating Seneca's *Weltanschauung*, and so to an extent, the plays thankfully lack this 'relevance'. Someday they may indeed come into their own again, but that should be a prospect to make you shudder and pause before spreading the academic relish. In the meantime, the senecan aesthetic continues to burn as a warning, sometimes eerily prophetic, against complacency.

> Did we deserve this?
> Do we seem worth the whole world
> swinging round on its poles to annihilate *us*?
> Has Armageddon come

[11] Wilson (2010), xxv.
[12] Wilson (2010), xxv.

(this time)

for us?

Poor creatures, born into the dark.

Either the sun has abandoned us

or we blasted it out of the sky.[13]

[13] *Nos e tanto visi populo / digni, premeret quos everso / cardine mundus? / In nos aetas ultima venit? / o nos dura sorte creatos, / seu perdidimus solem miseri / sive expulimus.* (Sen. *Thy*. 875-78)

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